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**LUCILE.**



# LUCILE.

BY

OWEN MEREDITH,

AUTHOR OF "THE WANDERER," "CLYTEMNESTRA," ETC.

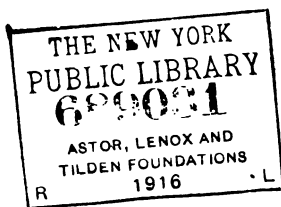
Edward Field & Co. Boston. 1851.

"Why, let the stricken deer go weep,  
The hart ungalled play;  
For some must watch, while some must sleep:  
Thus runs the world away!" — *Hamlet*.

BOSTON:  
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

M DCCC LX.

186.



AUTHOR'S EDITION.

WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE  
THE TITUS ANDRONICUS

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE.  
PRINTED BY H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY

## DEDICATION.

---

### TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavoured to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labour which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement, and doubt, my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honoured name with which I thus seek to associate it: nor yet, because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection *that is best honoured by the silence which it renders sacred.*

## DEDICATION.

ings only such as those with which, in days  
there existed for me no critic less gentle  
myself, I brought to you my childish manu-  
s; feelings only such as those which have, in  
years, associated with your heart all that has  
ved or occupied my own — lead me once more  
seek assurance from the grasp of that hand  
which has hitherto been my guide and comfort  
through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil  
beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition be-  
yond the neighbouring approval of the night, I  
brought to you the morning's task for the evening's  
sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed  
task-work of maturer years; less confident indeed  
of your approval, but not less confident of your  
love; and anxious only to realize your presence  
between myself and the public, and to mingle with  
those severer voices to whose final sentence I sub-  
mit my work, the beloved and gracious accents of  
your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

VIENNA, March, 1860.

# LUCILE.

---

## PART I. CANTO I.

LETTER FROM THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD  
ALFRED VARGRAVE.

### I.

‘ I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I am told  
‘ You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old  
‘ So long since you may have forgotten it now,  
‘ (When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers  
to grow)  
‘ Your last words recorded a pledge — what you  
will —  
‘ A promise — the time is now come to fulfil.  
‘ The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,  
‘ I desire to receive from your hand. You discern  
‘ My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.  
‘ The distance to Serchon is short. I remain  
‘ A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, per-  
chance,  
‘ Will forego one brief page from the summer ro-  
mance  
‘ Of her courtship, and spare you one day from  
your place  
‘ At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.  
‘ I desire nothing more, and I trust you will feel  
‘ I desire nothing much.  
‘ Your friend always,  
‘ LUCILE.’



## II.

Now in May Fair, of course, — in the fair month  
of May —

When all things in abundance make London so  
gay ;

When street-strawberries are sold, piled in pottles  
like sheaves,

And young ladies are sold for the strawberry-  
leaves ;

When cards, invitations, and three-corner'd notes  
Fly about like white butterflies — gay little motes  
In the sunbeam of Fashion ; and even Blue Books  
Take a heavy-wing'd flight, and grow busy as  
rooks ;

And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and  
stern,

Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,  
Those lots which so often decide if our day  
Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay)  
Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or  
other

Than Cadmus himself put together, to bother  
The heads of Hellenes, — I say, in the season,  
Of fair May in May Fair, there can be no reason  
Why, when calmly absorbing your dry-toast and  
butter,

Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter  
At the sight of a neat little letter, address'd  
In a woman's hand-writing, containing, half-guess'd,  
An odour of violets faint as the spring,  
And coquettishly sealed with a small signet-ring.

autumn, the season of sombre reflection,  
amp day, at breakfast, begins with de-

and Paris, and ill at one's ease,  
t of the blue Pyrenees,  
the doctor, a stroll to the bath,

A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,  
 A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,  
 Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,  
 The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,  
 And a letter may alter the plans we arranged  
 Over-night, for the slaughter of Time — a wild  
     beast,  
 Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,  
 Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,  
 And more mischievous too, than the Lynx or the  
     Bear.

## III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already  
 Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,  
 Lord Alfred now dash'd it away with a cry  
 Of angry surprise. If a shell from the sky  
 On the board, where he then sat at breakfast, had  
     bounded  
 And burst, he could scarcely have look'd more  
     astounded,  
 Or more speedily spurn'd it.

The month is September ;

Time, morning ; the scene at Bigorre ; (pray re-  
     member

These facts, gentle reader, because I intend  
 To fling all the unities by at the end.)  
 He walk'd to the window. The morning was chill :  
 The brown woods were crisp'd in the cold on the  
     hill ;

The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind :  
 And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in  
     his mind,  
 Rose, and eddied around and around, as tho' teasing  
 Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleas-  
     ing :

And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,  
 To himself more than once (vex'd in soul) sigh'd  
     ..... ' Confound it !'

## IV.

What the thoughts may have been which this bad  
interjection  
Disclosed, I must leave to the reader's detection ;  
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,  
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin  
John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool !

LORD ALFRED.

Who ?

COUSIN JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do ;  
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades  
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,  
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,  
To travel about with a woman in love, —  
Unless she's in love with himself.

LORD ALFRED.

Indeed ! why

Are you here then, dear Jack ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Can't you guess it ?

LORD ALFRED.

Not I.

COUSIN JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that's better to do.  
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,  
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by my-  
self.

*That perverse, imperturbable, golden-hair'd elf —  
Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me  
Such a dance through these hills —*

LORD ALFRED.

Who, Matilda ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Yes ! she,  
Of course ! who but she could contrive so to keep  
One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep  
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four ?

LORD ALFRED.

What's the matter ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more  
I consider about it, the more it demands  
An attention it does not deserve ; and expands  
Beyond the dimensions which ev'n crinoline,  
When possess'd by a fair face and saucy Eighteen,  
Is entitled to take in this very small star,  
Already too crowded, as I think, by far.  
You read Malthus and Sadler ?

LORD ALFRED.

Of course.

COUSIN JOHN.

To what use,  
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous  
    abuse  
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space  
In this world ? Mars, Apollo, Virorum ! the case  
Wholly passes my patience.

LORD ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

COUSIN JOHN.

*Yours, Alfred ?*

LORD ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide.

COUSIN JOHN (*reading the letter*).

'I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told  
'You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old —'  
What is this?

LORD ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you'll know.

COUSIN JOHN (*continues reading*).

'When we parted, your last words recorded a vow—  
'What you will' . . .

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear.

Of adventures and violets. Was it your hair  
You promised a lock of?

LORD ALFRED.

Read on. You'll discover.

COUSIN JOHN (*continues*).

'Those letters I ask you, my lord, let  
Humph! . . . Letters! . . .  
than I guess'd  
I have my misgiving

And advise.

'Will  
'Of

Egad! a romance for me  
I'd forego every page of, and not dream of

LOREN ALBELL

Continue!

CORIN JONES

'And spare you the trouble of  
'At her feet.' . . .

Pray forgive me the mistake,  
I wish you had MY place

(reads)

'I desire nothing much. You know  
The Comtesse de Nevers?

The Comtesse de Nevers?



COUSIN JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.  
 In an hour ~~the~~ horses will be at the door,  
 And Matilda is ~~now~~ in her habit. Before  
 I have finish'd my breakfast, of course I receive  
 A message for '*dear Cousin John!*' . . . I must  
 leave  
 At the jeweller's the bracelet which *you* broke last  
 night;  
 I must call for the music. 'Dear Alfred is right:  
 'The black shawl looks best: *will* I change it? of  
 course  
 'I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.  
 'Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows  
 what;  
 'Will I see the dog-doctor?' Hang Beau! I will  
*not*.

' LORD ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

COUSIN JOHN.

It is.

LORD ALFRED.

Very well,

You must think—

COUSIN JOHN.

What excuse will you make tho'?

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, tell

Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack! . . .  
 the deuce!

*Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's  
 use?*

*Excuses are clothes which, when ask'd unawares,*

Good Breeding to naked Necessity spares.  
You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

COUSIN JOHN.

My dear fellow,  
Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

LORD ALFRED.

You joke.

COUSIN JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Serchon ?

LORD ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear  
John.

Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,  
Before I extinguish for ever the fire  
Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light  
Hope whisper'd her first fairy tales, to excite  
The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn  
Of my days where the twilights of life were first  
drawn

By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love :  
In short, from the dead Past the grave-stone to  
move ;

Of the years long departed for ever to take  
One last look, one final farewell ; to awake  
The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,  
And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack —  
a boy !

COUSIN JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

LORD ALFRED.

No ! were it but  
To make *sure* that the Past from the Future is  
*shut,*



It were worth the step back. Do you think we  
 should live  
 With the living so lightly, and learn to survive  
 That wild moment in which to the grave and its  
 gloom  
 We consign'd our heart's best, if the doors of the  
 tomb  
 Were not lock'd with a key which Fate keeps for  
 our sake ?  
 If the dead could return, or the corpses awake ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Nonsense ! nonsense !

LORD ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up  
 A fill'd guest from the banquet, and drains off his  
 cup,  
 Sees the last lamp extinguish'd with cheerfulness,  
 goes  
 Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.  
 But he who hath supp'd at the tables of kings,  
 And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things ;  
 Who hath watch'd the wine flow, by himself but  
 half tasted,  
 Heard the music, and yet miss'd the tune ; who  
 hath wasted  
 One part of life's grand possibilities ; — friend,  
 That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,  
 A blighted experience, a rancour within :  
 You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

COUSIN JOHN.

I see you remember that cynical story  
 Of the wicked old profligate fellow — a hoary  
 Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed  
 (Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,  
*And observing, with no small amount of surprise,*  
*Resignation and calm in the old sinner's eyes*)

Ask'd if he had nothing that weigh'd on his mind :  
 ' Well, . . . no,' . . . says Lothario, ' I think not.  
     I find,  
 ' On reviewing my life, which in most things was  
     pleasant,  
 ' I never neglected, when once it was present,  
 ' An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,  
 ' I have nought to regret ;' . . . and so, smiling,  
     his soul  
 Took its flight from this world.

LORD ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,  
 Which is best ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Why, Regret.

LORD ALFRED.

No ; Remorse, Jack, of course ;  
 For the one is related, be sure, to the other.  
 Regret is a spiteful old maid : but her brother,  
 Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet  
*Has* been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack,  
     hang Regret !

COUSIN JOHN.

*Bref!* you mean, then, to go ?

LORD ALFRED.

*Bref!* I do.

COUSIN JOHN.

One word . . . stay  
 Are you really in love with Matilda ?

LORD ALFRED.

*What a question !* Of course.

Love, eh ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Were you really in love  
With Madame de Nevers ?

LORD ALFRED.

What ; Lucile ? No, by Jove,  
Never really.

COUSIN JOHN.

She's pretty ?

LORD ALFRED.

Decidedly so.

At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.  
As pale as an evening in autumn — with hair  
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which  
the air

Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone  
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting  
sun.

Eyes — the wistful gazelle's ; the fine foot of a fairy ;  
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, — white and  
airy ;

A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows.  
Something in her there was, set you thinking of  
those

Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic  
and deep

Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

COUSIN JOHN.

Coquette ?

LORD ALFRED.

Not at all. 'Twas her one fault. Not she !  
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.  
*The heart of a man's like that delicate weed*  
*Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,*

Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.  
'Tis a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

COUSIN JOHN.

Women change so.

LORD ALFRED.

Of course.

COUSIN JOHN.

And, unless rumour errs,  
I believe that, last year, the Comtesse de Nevers \*  
Was at Baden the rage — held an absolute court  
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport  
Of her subjects.

LORD ALFRED.

Indeed !

COUSIN JOHN.

When she broke off with you  
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it ?

LORD ALFRED.

Pooh !

Pray would you have had her dress always in  
black,  
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack ?  
Besides, 'twas my fault the engagement was broken.

\* O, Shakespeare! how couldst thou ask 'What's in a name?  
'Tis the devil's in it, when a bard has to frame  
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French:  
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench  
All too far on that licence which critics refuse,  
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.  
Yet, tho' faulty the union, in many a line,  
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French heroine,  
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,  
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,  
*Your forgiveness for this pair, the author invites,  
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.*

COUSIN JOHN.

I dare say. How was that?

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, the tale is soon spoken.  
She bored me. I show'd it. She saw it. What  
next?

She reproach'd. I retorted. Of course she was  
vex'd.

I was vex'd that she was so. She sulk'd. So did I.  
If I ask'd her to sing, she look'd ready to cry.

I was contrite, submissive. She soften'd. I harden'd.

At noon I was banish'd. At eve I was pardon'd.

She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.

I swore she talk'd nonsense. She sobb'd I talk'd  
treason.

In short, my dear fellow, 'twas time, as you see,  
Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'Twas  
she

By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.  
She released me. I linger'd. I linger'd, she thought,  
With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,  
The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,  
And declare myself uncomprehended. And so  
We parted. The rest of the story you know.

COUSIN JOHN.

No, indeed.

LORD ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not  
Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.

You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Fer-  
dinando

Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.

*I think that I acted exceedingly well,  
Considering the time when this rupture befel,  
For Paris was charming just then. It deranged*

All my plans for the winter. I ask'd to be changed—  
Wrote for Naples, then vacant — obtain'd it — and

so  
Join'd my new post at once ; but scarce reach'd it,  
when lo !

My first news from Paris informs me Lucile  
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.  
I fly back. I find her recover'd, but yet  
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret.  
I ask to renew the engagement.

COUSIN JOHN.

And she ?

LORD ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be  
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing !  
We each keep our letters. . . . a portrait . . . a  
ring . . .

With a pledge to return them whenever the one  
Or the other shall call for them back.

COUSIN JOHN.

Pray go on.

LORD ALFRED.

My story is finish'd. Of course I enjoin  
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin  
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,  
When Love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She  
obeys.

She goes out in the world ; takes to dancing once  
more —

A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.  
I go back to my post, and collect (I must own  
'Tis a taste I had never before, my dear John)  
Antiques and *small Elzevirs*. Heigho ! now, Jack,  
*You know all.*

COUSIN JOHN (*after a pause*).

You are really resolved to go back ?

LORD ALFRED.

Eh, where ?

COUSIN JOHN.

To that worst of all places — the past.  
You remember Lot's wife ?

LORD ALFRED.

'Twas a promise when last  
We parted. My honour is pledged to it.

COUSIN JOHN.

Well,  
What is it you wish me to do ?

LORD ALFRED.

You must tell  
Matilda, I meant to have call'd — to leave word —  
To explain — but the time was so pressing —

COUSIN JOHN.

My lord,  
Your lordship's obedient ! I really can't do . . .

LORD ALFRED.

You wish then to break off my marriage ?

COUSIN JOHN.

No, no !  
But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take  
These letters.

LORD ALFRED.

*Not see ? would you have me, then, break  
A promise my honour is pledged to ?*

COUSIN JOHN (*humming*).

‘*Off, off,*  
*And away ! said the stranger*’ . . .

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, good ! oh, you scoff !

COUSIN JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred ?

LORD ALFRED.

At all things !

COUSIN JOHN.

Indeed ?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes ! I see that your heart is as dry as a reed.  
You’re a *blasé* unprincipled *roué*. I see  
You have no feeling left in you, even for me !  
At honour you jest ; you are cold as a stone.  
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have  
    none ;  
You have lost faith in all things. You carry a  
    blight  
About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight  
Of such callous indifference, who could be calm ?  
I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last  
    balm  
That is left me in Gilead you’ll turn into gall.  
Heartless, cold, unconcern’d . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Have you done ? Is that all ?  
Well, then, listen to me ! I presume when you  
    made  
Up *your mind* to propose to Miss Darcy, you  
    weigh’d



All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,  
 Ere you finally settled the point. What remains  
 But to stick to your choice? You want money :  
      'tis here.

A settled position : 'tis yours. A career :  
 You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,  
 Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch  
 To be running away on the eve of all this  
 To a woman whom never for once did you miss  
 All these years since you left her? Who knows  
      what may hap?

This letter — to *me* — is a palpable trap.  
 The woman has changed since you knew her.  
      Perchance

She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.

When women begin to feel youth and their beauty  
 Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty  
 To let nothing else slip away unsecured  
 Which these, while they lasted, might once have  
      procured.

Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,  
 I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish  
      lingers

To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover  
 To the feet he has left : let intrigue now recover  
 What truth could not keep. 'Twere a vengeance,  
      no doubt —

A triumph ; — but why must *you* bring it about?  
 You are risking the substance of all that you  
      schemed

To obtain ; and for what? some mad dream you  
      have dream'd !

LORD ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate,  
      *Jack.*

*You mistake.* In three days, at the most, I am  
      *back.*

## COUSIN JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,  
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;  
Pre-occupied, sulky, and likely enough  
To make your *Fiancée* break off in a huff.  
Three days do you say? But in three days who  
knows  
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

## V.

Of all the good things in this good world around  
us,  
The one most abundantly furnish'd and found us,  
And which, for that reason, we least care about,  
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no  
doubt.  
But advice, when 'tis sought from a friend (tho'  
civility  
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability  
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,  
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to endorse.  
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.  
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more  
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed  
it.  
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it  
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,  
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,  
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack  
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack  
A slender valise (the one small condescension  
Which his final remonstrance obtain'd) whose dimension  
Excluded large *outfits*; and, cursing his stars, he  
Shook hands with his friend and return'd to Miss  
*Darcy*.

## VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turn'd,  
Ere he lock'd up and quitted his chamber, discern'd  
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright  
In what Virgil has called 'Youth's purplest light'  
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).  
He sigh'd as he look'd at her. Did he regret her?  
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,  
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,  
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,  
With their little impertinent look of surprise,  
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below  
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow, —  
I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance  
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance  
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now  
petted  
That fine English mare, I should much have re-  
gretted  
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour  
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.  
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky  
Way  
Could turn into a woman, 'twould look, I dare say,  
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

## VII.

But whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh  
With which Alfred Vargrave now watch'd her ride  
by,  
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,  
As he turn'd from the window, he certainly sigh'd.

## CANTO II.

## I.

LETTER FROM LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE TO  
THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

‘Bigorre, Tuesday.

‘YOUR note, Madam, reach’d me to-day, at Bi-  
gorre,‘And commands (need I add) my obedience.  
Before

‘The night I shall be at Serchon — where a line,

‘If sent to Duval’s, the hotel where I dine,

‘Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive

‘My respects.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘A. VARGRAVE.

‘I leave

‘In an hour.’

## II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this,  
 Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,  
 Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and  
 pursued,

In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,  
 The reflections that journey gave rise to.

And here,

Dear Reader, (for when was a reader not dear?)

Let me pause to describe you my hero.

## III.

We all  
 Have seen in the world, at an opera or ball,  
 Or read of in books, or heard sung of in songs,  
 Or encounter’d, perchance, ’mid the gay idle  
 throngs

Whom at Baden or Homburg, at evening, one sees,  
 Lounging over green tables, or under green trees,  
 In the sound of the music, the light of the flambeaux,  
 Two kinds of Don Juan.

They are *Arcades ambo*.  
 The one is Italian or French : a point, rather  
 Disputed : I think tho', Molière was his father.  
 For the rest, of his family nothing is known.  
 Of his sponsors, 'tis said that a croupier was one,  
 The other an actress at Paris : perchance  
 His life's a libretto, his birth a romance.  
 But his name is Don Juan. Of that there's no  
 question.

He boasts a bold beauty. He owns a digestion  
*Æs triplex et robur*, for lobsters and oysters ;  
 The darling of grisettes, the terror of cloisters.  
 He is insolent, noisy, extravagant, vain.  
 On the whole, he is vulgar. But one thing is plain,  
 The women don't think him so. Would you know  
 why ?

His name is Don Juan.

We'll let him pass by  
 Because he's a quarrelsome fellow.

IV.

The other  
 Some persons have taken, I hear, for his brother.  
 But this, I believe, is an error.

Indeed,  
 If, though but for a moment, you'll look with due  
 heed

In the face of this so-call'd relation, you'll see  
 That he springs from a different family tree.  
 In fact he is English. One cannot but know it ;  
 His features, his manners, his conduct, all show it.  
 He belongs to a northern nobility, and  
*His sire was a Lovelace.*

I think that George Sand  
*Must have met him and known him when, after the  
 Peace,*

He made the grand tour of the Continent. Greece,  
Spain, Italy, Egypt, he ran them all through  
While the down on his lip and his chin was yet  
new.

His classical reading is great: he can quote  
Horace, Juvenal, Ovid, and Martial by rote.  
He has read *Metaphysics* . . . Spinoza and Kant ;  
And Theology too: I have heard him descant  
Upon Basil and Jerome. Antiquities, art,  
He is fond of. He knows the old masters by heart,  
And his taste is refined. I must own in this place  
He is scarcely good-looking; and yet in his face  
There is something that makes you gaze at it again.  
You single him out from a room full of men,  
And feel curious to know him. There's that in his  
look

Which draws you to read in it, as in a book,  
Of some cabalist, character'd curiously o'er  
With an incomprehensible legended lore.  
Relentless, and patient, and resolute, cold,  
Unimpassion'd, and callous, and silently bold,  
Whatever affords him pursuit is pursued  
As a wild beast pursues, and devours his food  
In the forest, impell'd by the instinct of prey.  
You can scarcely despise, tho' abhor him you  
may ;

For you feel, with a thrill, as you track through the  
world

The course of his destiny, snakily curl'd  
In the roses, or branding with thunder the heath,  
Some bad angel hath pass'd there. The Angel of  
Death,

Or Destruction, it may be.

So, leave him.

v.

There are,  
Here and there, in *Life's* great lazaretto, though  
rare,

Certain men whose disease of the heart is more  
 deep,

Though less deadly. Yet something there is, makes  
 me weep

When I strive to describe them. I search, but in  
 vain,

For the words that should render the portraiture  
 plain.

Nine cycles with Dante my muse hath descended ;  
 In the hollows of hell I have gather'd and blended  
 All hues of the pale, pulsing flamelight ; and yet  
 The picture is vague as a virgin's regret,  
 And designs but a shadow, that wavers, and goes,  
 And returns, on the twilight of thought.

Such are those

Whom my verse would in vain comprehend. Alas !  
 they

Comprehend not themselves.

They are drawn off one way

By their passions, and drawn back again by their  
 heart ;

A vague but immortal regret, with its dart,  
 Pursues them for ever ; and drives them with  
 pain

From themselves to the world, from the world back  
 again

To themselves.

Having fail'd at the springs they seek first  
 To satiate wholly the undying thirst  
 Of a deathless desire, they would quench it for ever  
 In the dregs of a sensual opiate ; — endeavour  
 To trample out that which is brightest in them,  
 The star that is set on their soul's diadem,  
 Because it has fail'd to enkindle in others  
 One spark from the glory which nothing quite  
 smothers :

*For they cannot all stifle the spirit. At night  
 They reel home from the orgy beneath the wan  
 light*

Of the star that reproachfully leads them. The  
world

In darkness and dream and oblivion is furl'd ;

Their destiny stirs and awakes in them then.

While their cheek with the wine is yet flushing,  
these men

Arise, and the serpent and ape at their feet

Crouch and huddle. Their hair creeps. Their  
brow gathers heat

From some seraph that sadly regards them. They  
start,

Like a god from the clay, into beauty and art.

What breaks from the lip with such passionate  
strain ?

Some wild song of the revel, re-echoed again ?

Nay, hark ! 'tis the psalm of the soul, as her  
wings

Are unfurl'd : — 'tis the Bard, 'tis no drunkard,  
that sings !

Heaven opens. Earth yawns. Hell delivers its  
prey.

The beast and false prophet slink, baffled, away.

The world stands afar off to wonder or scoff —

The chariots of Israel, the horsemen thereof !

The spirit ascends through the heavenly portal,

And the mantle, descending, hath cover'd the  
mortal !

The man is a profligate sensualist,

The man's life a reckless debauch, you insist :

Let the man's life be all that you will, I appeal

The man's work is immortal — behold it and  
kneel !

But the life of the man ? Can you tell where it  
lies ?

In the effort to sink, or the power to rise ?

Can you guess what the thirst is, the man quenches  
thus ?

*Vain ! shall we tell what he fails to tell us ?*



## VI.

To this class my hero remotely belongs —  
A class, doubtless, more common in life than in  
songs.

If genius he had not, at least he had much  
That to genius is kindred : one feverish touch  
Of that hunger which urges for ever the soul  
To some infinite, distant, impossible goal :  
The horseleech's daughter that cries in the heart  
With her ceaseless '*give, give !*' and sits pining  
apart  
From the purpose of all things.

## VII.

The age is gone o'er  
When a man may in all things be all. We have  
more  
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,  
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to ; but  
out  
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when  
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken ?  
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our  
own  
Is too vast and too complex for one man alone  
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close  
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in  
those  
Irreclaimable days ; but in these days of ours  
In dividing the work we distribute the powers.  
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees  
more  
Than the 'live giant's eyesight avail'd to explore ;  
And in life's lengthen'd alphabet what used to be  
*To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.*  
*A Varini is roasted alive for his pains,*  
*But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.*

A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle  
 And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,  
 Till a More or Lavater step into his place,  
 Then the world turns and makes an admiring  
 grimace.

Once the men were so great and so few, they  
 appear,

Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,  
 Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.

Now the men are so many and small, disengage  
 One man from the million to mark him, next mo-  
 ment

The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your com-  
 ment ;

And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)  
 'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes be-  
 longs,

We take the whole age for a hero, in want  
 Of a better ; and still, in its favour, descant  
 On the strength and the beauty which, failing to  
 find

In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

#### VIII.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve  
 So little, because of the much they conceive.

A redundantly sensuous nature, each pore  
 Ever patent to beauty, had yet left him sore  
 With a sense of impossible power. He saw  
 Too keenly the void 'twixt the absolute law  
 And the partial attainment. He knock'd at each  
 one

Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.

His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,  
 And whatever he did he was sure to regret.

That target, discuss'd by the travellers of old,  
 Which to one appear'd argent, to one appear'd  
 gold,

To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margin,  
 Appear'd in one moment both golden and argent.  
 The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,  
 May hope to achieve it before life be done ;  
 But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,  
 Only reaps from the hopes which around him he  
                   sows

A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm  
 That crawls on in the dust to the definite term  
 Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more  
 Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,  
 In its limited vision, is happier far  
 Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fix'd by no  
                   friendly star,  
 Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows  
 Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

## IX.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,  
 Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seem'd able  
 To dazzle, but not to illumine, mankind.  
 A vigorous, various, versatile mind ;  
 A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,  
 As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,  
 Vague and flitting, but on it for ever impressing  
 The shape of some substance at which you stand  
                   guessing :  
 When you said, ' All is worthless and weak here,'  
                   behold !  
 Into sight on a sudden there seem'd to unfold  
 Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man :  
 When you said, ' This is genius,' the outlines grew  
                   wan.  
 And his life, tho' in all things so gifted and skill'd,  
 Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfill'd.

## X.

*In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can de-  
                   flower*

The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of  
man's power

Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!

In that life one occasion, one moment, there was  
When all that was earnest in him might have been  
Unclosed into manhood's imperial, serene  
Dominion of permanent power. But it found him  
Too soon; ere the weight of the light life around  
him

Had been weigh'd at its worth; when his nature  
was still

The delicate toy of too pliant a will  
The boisterous play of the world to resist,  
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He miss'd

That occasion, too rath in its advent.

Since then,

He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,  
That intensity in him which only left sore  
The heart it disturb'd, to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,  
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, dis-  
closed,

In resigning the power he lack'd power to support,  
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the  
court,

In his converse this man for self-comfort appeal'd  
To a cynic denial of all he conceal'd

In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.

Words, however, are things: and the man who  
accords

To his language the license to outrage his soul,  
Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.

And, therefore, he seem'd in the deeds of each  
day,

The light code proclaim'd on his lips to obey;  
And, the slave of each whim, follow'd wilfully  
aught

That perchance fool'd the fancy, or flatter'd the  
thought.

Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,  
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,  
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirr'd  
themselves — strove to start

Into deeds — tho' deposed, in that Hades, his heart.  
Like those antique Theogonies ruin'd and hurl'd  
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the  
world,

Heav'd, in earthquake, their heads the rent cav-  
erns above,

To trouble at times in the light court of Jove  
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,  
Of wrong'd rebel powers that own'd not their law.  
Yes! still in his nature was more than enough  
(Altho' self-disputed) of strong English stuff,  
Which, had he been forced to some claim dis-  
allow'd

By the world, to push firmly his path thro' that  
crowd

Amidst which he now lounged, would have welded  
in one

Earnest purpose the powers now conscious of none,  
Because squander'd on many. And therefore, if  
born

To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid  
scorn

Secured by the world's stern resistance), where  
strife,

Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to  
life,

He, no doubt before this, would have lived to  
attain

Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,  
Had he been of his own house the first-born, each

gift

*Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift  
A great name by a name's greatest uses.*

But there

He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,  
To life's great realities ; part of no plan ;  
And if ever a nobler and happier man  
He might hope to become, that alone could be  
when

With all that is real in life and in men  
What was real in him should have been reconciled ;

When each influence now from his being exiled  
Should have seized on his being, combined with  
his nature,

And form'd, as by fusion, a new human creature :  
As when those airy elements viewless to sight  
(The amalgam of which, if our science be right,  
The germ of this populous planet doth fold)  
Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold !

Where a void seem'd before, there a substance  
appears,

From the fusion of forces whence issued the  
spheres !

XI.

As it was, his chief fault was an unconscious awe  
Of the little world, falsely call'd great, and the  
law

Of its lawless dictators ; — an awe not indeed  
Of that great world which justly on each human  
deed

Sits umpire, adjudging man's worth o'er man's  
grave,

Like those solemn Tribunals of Egypt, which gave  
Or denied to her dead kings the tombs of the  
kings :

That grand court of Public Opinion, whence  
springs

Man's loyal allegiance to lofty control,  
*Which confines not his life, but concentrates his  
soul.*

For obedience is nobler than freedom. What's  
free ?

The vex'd straw on the wind, the froth'd spume  
on the sea :

The great ocean itself, as it rolls and it swells,  
In the bonds of a boundless obedience dwells.

' Ah, what will the world say ? ' . . THE WORLD ! —  
therein lies

The question which, as it is utter'd, implies  
All that's fine or that's feeble in thought and in-  
tent.

The distinction depends on the *world* that is meant.  
Was it base, our own Nelson's life-cry for ' A place  
In Westminster Abbey, and Victory ' ? Base,  
The Hero's last thought — ' Will men murmur my  
name

In Athens ? ' Base ? no !

What is man's faith in fame,  
But respect for the world's good opinion ?

What then ?  
Is it noble (since man owes submission to men  
As the judges of man) the Fop's query — ' Those  
cavillers

' And gossips, what say they of me at the Travel-  
lers',

' Or White's ? ' Noble ? no !

Whence is faith weak in act,  
But from fear of the world's false opinion ?

## XII.

In fact,  
Had Lord Alfred found that rare communion  
which links

With what woman feels purely, what man nobly  
thinks,

And by hallowing life's hopes, enlarges life's  
*strength,*

*His shrewd tact* had moulded and master'd at  
*length*

The world that now master'd and moulded his will.  
An affluent sympathy, dexterous skill,  
And prompt apprehension in him, would have  
saved

His life from the failures of those who have braved  
The world, with no clue to its intricate plan,  
And made him a great, and a practical man.  
But the permanent cause why his life fail'd and  
miss'd

The full value of life was, — where man should  
resist

The world, which man's genius is call'd to com-  
mand,

He gave way, less from lack of the power to with-  
stand

Than from lack of the resolute will to retain  
Those strongholds of life which the world strives  
to gain.

For let a man once show the world that he feels  
Afraid of its bark, and 'twill fly at his heels:  
Let him fearlessly face it, 'twill leave him alone:  
But 'twill fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone.

## XIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,  
Was unfolding from darkness and dreamland the  
lull

Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills  
Watch'd, well-pleased, their fair slaves, the light,  
foam-footed rills,

Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of  
their courts,

And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports.  
Like ogres in council those mountains look'd down,  
Impassive, each king in his purple and crown.

Lord Alfred (by this on his journeyings far)

Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,

And brokenly humming an old opera strain,

And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spair



Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;  
 When suddenly, out of the darkness of night,  
 A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,  
 And so startled his steed, that was winding at will  
 Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led  
 O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its  
 head

Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand  
 Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,  
 Both rider and horse might have been in a trice  
 Hurl'd horribly over the grim precipice.

## XIV.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,  
 And the oath, with which nothing can find unpro-  
 vided

A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,  
 Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did  
 Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not  
 ruder

Than such inroad would warrant, survey'd the in-  
 truder,

Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory  
 My hero, and finish'd abruptly this story.

## XV.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,  
 Well mounted, and simple though rich in his  
 dress,

Wore his beard and moustache in the fashion of  
 France.

His face, which was pale, gather'd force from the  
 glance

Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.

With a gest of apology, touch'd with surprise,

He lifted his hat, bow'd, and courteously made

*Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as be-  
 tray'd,*

*At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.*

## XVI.

I swear  
I have wander'd about in the world everywhere ;  
From many strange mouths have heard many  
    strange tongues ;  
Strain'd with many strange idioms my lips and my  
    lungs ;  
Walk'd in many a far land, regretting my own ;  
In many a language groan'd many a groan ;  
And have often had reason to curse those wild fel-  
    lows  
Who built the high house at which Heaven turn'd  
    jealous,  
Making human audacity stumble and stammer  
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of  
    Grammar.  
But the language of languages dearest to me  
Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie*,  
When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for  
    hours,  
You explain'd what was silently said by the flowers,  
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame  
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmur'd  
    *je t'aime*.  
O my Rosebud of Pæstum, whose bloom never dies!  
Now dead on my bosom that dear flow'ret lies ;  
But the meaning you gave to it then cannot fade ;  
In my being it blooms, and its fragrance hath made  
A garden within me, where memory strays,  
Evermore, with faint footfalls, down blossoming  
    ways.

## XVII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks ; the Spanish  
Smell, I fancy, of garlic ; the Swedish and Danish  
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod,  
    *in*  
*Their accent for mouths not descended from Odin ;*

German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheez-  
ing  
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneez-  
ing;  
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,  
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word  
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without  
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,  
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly flut-  
ter'd,  
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had  
been utter'd.  
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve,  
I feel myself quietly falling in love.

## XVIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased  
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which  
pleased  
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells  
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells  
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark  
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark  
Without fear.

Not unfavourably thus impress'd,  
As it seem'd, with each other, the two men abreast  
Rode on slowly a moment.

## XIX.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are  
A smoker. Allow me!

LORD ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.'

STRANGER.

*Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.  
Do you go to Serchon?*

LORD ALFRED.

Yes ; and you ?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,  
Since our road is the same, that our journey must  
be  
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You  
see  
How narrow the path is. I'm tempted to ask  
Your permission to finish (no difficult task !)  
The cigar you have given me (really a prize !)  
In your company.

LORD ALFRED.

Charm'd, Sir, to find your road lies  
In the way of my own inclinations ! Indeed  
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.  
In the distant Savannahs a talisman grows  
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who  
knows ?  
That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevard* out-  
broke,  
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in  
smoke.  
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)  
Have done more in their way human kind to  
unite  
Than ten Prudhons perchance.  
What a wonderful spot !  
This air is delicious ; the day was too hot.

STRANGER.

Ah, yes ! did you chance scarce a half-hour ago  
To remark that miraculous sunset ?

LORD ALFRED.

Why, no.

STRANGER.

All the occident, fused in one fierce conflagration,  
Stream'd flame : and the hills, as in grim expectation,  
Scarr'd and hoary stood round, like severe hiero-  
phants  
When at some savage rite the red flame breathes  
and pants  
And expands for a victim.

LORD ALFRED.

A very old trick !  
One would think that the sun by this time must be  
sick  
Of blushing with such a parade of disdain  
For this frivolous world he enlightens in vain.  
I see you're a poet.

STRANGER.

Who is not, alone  
In these mountains ? For me, though, I own I am  
none.  
Man's life is but short, and the youth of a man  
Is yet shorter. I wish to enjoy what I can.  
A sunset, if only a sunset be near ;  
A moon such as this, if the weather be clear ;  
A good dinner, if hunger come with it ; good wine,  
If I'm thirsty ; a fire, if I'm cold ; and, in fine,  
If a woman is pretty, to me 'tis no matter,  
Be she *blonde* or *brunette*, so she lets me look at her.

LORD ALFRED.

I suspect that at Serchon, if rumour speak true,  
Your choice is not limited.

STRANGER.

Yes. One or two  
*Of our young Paris ladies* remain there, but yet  
*The season is over.*

LORD ALFRED.

I almost forget  
The place ; but remember when last I was there,  
I thought the best part of it then was the air  
And the mountains.

STRANGER.

No doubt ! all these baths are the same.  
One wonders for what upon earth the world came  
To seek, under all sorts of difficulties,  
The very same things in the far Pyrenees  
Which it fled from at Paris. Health, which is, no  
doubt,  
The true object of all, not a soul talks about.  
'Tis a sort of religion.

LORD ALFRED.

You know the place well ?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

LORD ALFRED. .

Pray who is the Belle  
Of the Baths at this moment ?

STRANGER.

The same who has been  
The belle of all places in which she is seen ;  
The belle of all Paris last winter ; last spring  
The belle of all Baden.

LORD ALFRED.

An uncommon thing !

STRANGER.

Sir, *an uncommon* beauty ! . . . I rather should  
*say,*

An uncommon character. Truly, each day  
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,  
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

LORD ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers !

STRANGER.

Do you know her ?

LORD ALFRED.

I know

Or, rather, I knew her, — a long time ago.  
I almost forget. . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace  
In her language! her movements! what play in  
her face!  
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal !

LORD ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,  
But not like a lover. What interests me so  
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,  
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,  
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,  
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,  
A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

LORD ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this  
shade

*Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make  
me afraid*

*Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have  
grown,*

Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own  
I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet  
They have all lack'd the skill to console this regret  
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil  
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems  
still

To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,  
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

## XX.

The stranger replied, not without irritation :  
'I have heard that an Englishman — one of your  
nation  
'I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,  
'To excuse the contempt which I . . .'

LORD ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed  
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his  
crime ?

STRANGER.

Oh, nothing ! His folly was not so sublime  
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,  
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

LORD ALFRED.

How ?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . I admit,  
Although I myself have no passion for it,  
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise  
The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes  
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips  
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,  
With a ruthless dissection ; since he, I suppose,  
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he  
does.  
*But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots*



The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots  
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because  
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and  
haws. —

One would wish, for the sake of each nurseling so  
nipp'd,  
To catch the young rascal and have him well  
whipp'd!

**LORD ALFRED.**

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,  
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English  
hand,  
Has injured your Rosebud of France ?

**STRANGER.**

Sir, I know  
But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show  
The last act of a tragedy in their regard :  
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not  
hard  
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have  
been,  
And what sort of actors have pass'd o'er the scene.  
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,  
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel  
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out,  
and burnt up  
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze  
down the cup  
Of extinguish'd volcanoes : you judge of the fire  
Once there, by the ravage you see ; — the desire,  
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense  
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

LORD ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finish'd, at last, your  
cigar:  
*Can I offer another?*

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are  
Not two miles from Serchon.

LORD ALFRED.

You know the road well ?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XXI.

Here a pause fell  
On their converse. Still, musingly on, side by side  
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride  
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each, for  
the rest

Of their journey, altho' they still rode on abreast,  
Continued to follow in silence the train  
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain ;  
And each, as though roused from a deep reverie,  
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see  
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,  
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,  
With the lamps twinkling through them — the  
quaint wooden roofs —  
The little white houses.

The clatter of hoofs,  
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls  
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals  
Reach'd them, cross'd by the sound of the clacking  
of whips,  
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine  
slips  
Of verdant rose-gardens, dew-shelter'd with screens  
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,  
They could mark the white dresses, and catch the  
light songs,  
Of the lovely Parisians that wander'd in throngs

Led by Laughter and Love through the cool even-  
 tide,  
 Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hill-side.

## XXII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'HERISSON,  
 (Pray go there, if ever you go to Serchon !)  
 The two horsemen, well pleased to have reach'd it,  
 alighted  
 And exchanged their last greetings.

The Frenchman invited  
 Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.  
 He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined  
 In his own rooms that night.

With an unquiet eye  
 He watch'd his companion depart; nor knew why,  
 Beyond all accountable reason or measure,  
 He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.  
 'The fellow's good-looking,' he murmur'd at last,  
 'And yet not a coxcomb.' Some ghost of the past  
 Vex'd him still.

'If he love her,' he thought, 'let him  
 win her.'  
 Then he turn'd to the future—and order'd his  
 dinner.

## XXIII.

O hour of all hours, the most bless'd upon earth,  
 Blessèd hour of our dinners !

The land of his birth ;  
 The face of his first love ; the bills that he owes ;  
 The twaddle of friends, and the venom of foes ;  
 The sermon he heard when to church he last went ;  
 The money he borrow'd, the money he spent ; —  
 All of these things a man, I believe, may forget,  
 And not be the worse for forgetting ; but yet  
 Never, never, oh never ! earth's luckiest sinner  
 Hath unpunish'd forgotten the hour of his dinner !  
*Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach*

Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some  
ache  
Or some pain ; and trouble, remorseless, his best  
ease,  
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

## XXIV.

We may live without poetry, music, and art ;  
We may live without conscience, and live without  
heart ;  
We may live without friends ; we may live without  
books ;  
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.  
He may live without books, — what is knowledge  
but grieving ?  
He may live without hope, — what is hope but de-  
ceiving ?  
He may live without love, — what is passion but  
pining ?  
But where is the man that can live without dining ?

## XXV.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note  
From Lucile.

‘ Your last letter has reach’d me,’ she wrote.  
‘ This evening, alas ! I must go to the ball,  
‘ And shall not be at home till too late for your call,  
‘ But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*. at One  
‘ You will find me at home, and will find me alone.  
‘ Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,  
‘ For the honour with which you adhere to your  
word.  
‘ Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred ! To-morrow, then.  
‘ L.’

●

## XXVI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell  
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung  
down

This note, as he pour'd out his wine. I must own  
That I think he, himself, could have hardly ex-  
plain'd  
Those feelings exactly.

‘Yes, yes,’ as he drain'd  
The glass down, he mutter'd, ‘Jack’s right, after  
all :

‘The coquette !’

‘Does milord mean to go to the ball ?’  
Ask'd the waiter, who linger'd.

‘Perhaps. I don’t know.  
‘You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go.’

XXVII.

Oh, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,  
When season'd by love, which no rancour disturbs,  
And sweeten'd by all that is sweetest in life,  
Than turbot, bisque, ortalans, eaten in strife !  
But if, out of humour, and hungry, alone  
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one  
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil  
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,  
The chances are ten against one, I must own,  
He gets up as ill-temper'd as when he sat down.  
And if any reader this fact to dispute is  
Disposed, I say . . . ‘*Allium edat cicutis*  
‘*Nocentius !*’

Round the fruit and the wine  
Undisturb'd the wasp settled. The evening was  
fine.

Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,  
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.  
The window was open. The warm air without  
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were  
about.

In the gloom he sat gloomy.

## XXVIII.

Gay sounds from below  
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,  
And night deepen'd apace: through the dark  
avenues  
The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes, and by  
twos,  
The idlers of Serchon were strolling at will,  
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-  
sill,  
Where his gaze, as he languidly turn'd it, fell o'er  
His late travelling companion, now passing before  
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,  
In full toilette,—boots varnish'd, and snowy cravat,  
Gaily smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,  
As he turn'd down the avenue.

Watching above,  
From his window, the stranger, who stopp'd as he  
walk'd  
To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now  
talk'd,  
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discern'd,  
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were  
turn'd,  
That his unknown acquaintance, now bound for  
the ball,  
Was a person of rank and of fashion; for all  
Whom he bow'd to in passing, or stopp'd with and  
chatter'd,  
Walk'd on with a look which implied . . . 'I feel  
flatter'd!'

## XXIX.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

## XXX.

*Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.  
He had finish'd, one after the other, a dozen*

Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin :  
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile :  
He had thought about many things : thought a  
great deal

Of himself : of his past life, his future, his present :  
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor  
crescent :

Of the gay world, so sad ! life, so sweet and so  
sour !

He had thought too, of glory, and fortune, and  
power :

Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy,  
and

A poet's asylum in some distant land :

Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no  
doubt,

In particular ; also he had thought much about  
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner : and last,  
He thought that the night would be stupidly pass'd.  
If he thought any more of such matters at all :  
So he rose, and resolved to set out for the ball.

## XXXI.

I believe, ere he finish'd his tardy toilette,  
That Lord Alfred had spoil'd, and flung by in a  
pet,

Half-a-dozen white neckcloths, and look'd for the  
nonce

Twenty times in the glass, if he look'd in it once.

I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,

Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.

And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,

When he reach'd the Casino, although he walk'd  
fast,

He heard, as he hurriedly enter'd the door,

The church clock strike Twelve.

## XXXII.

The last waltz was just o'er.

The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.  
 A crowd block'd the door: and a buzz and a  
     mutter  
 Went about in the room as a young man, whose  
     face  
 Lord Alfred had seen ere he enter'd that place,  
 But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and  
     warm  
 Flowery porch, with a lady that lean'd on his arm  
 Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,  
 Left the ballroom.

## XXXIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise  
 Reach'd Lord Alfred as just then he enter'd.

‘*Ma foi!*’

Said a Frenchman beside him, . . . ‘That lucky  
     Luvois  
 ‘Has obtain’d all the gifts of the gods . . . rank  
     and wealth,  
 ‘And good looks, and then such inexhaustible  
     health!  
 ‘He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I  
     surmise,  
 ‘Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes  
 ‘Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguish’d than  
     all,  
 ‘He so gaily goes off with the belle of the ball.’  
 ‘Is it true,’ ask’d a lady aggressively fat,  
 Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat  
 By another that look’d like a needle, all steel  
 And tenuity — ‘Luvois will marry Lucile?’  
 The needle seem’d jerk’d by a virulent twitch,  
 As tho’ it were bent upon driving a stitch  
 Thro’ somebody’s character.

‘Madam,’ replied

Interposing a young man who sat by their side,  
*And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,*  
 ‘*I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,*



‘ If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused.  
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.

‘ Refused ! . . . what ! a young Duke, not thirty, my  
dear,

‘ With at least half a million (what is it ?) a year !’

‘ That may be,’ said the third ; ‘ yet I know some  
time since

‘ Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a  
Prince.

‘ But Luvois, who was never before in his life

‘ In love with a woman who was not a wife,

‘ Is now certainly serious.’

## XXXIV.

The music once more  
Recommenced.

## XXXV.

Said Lord Alfred, ‘ This ball is a bore !’  
And return’d to the inn, somewhat worse than  
before.

## XXXVI.

There, whilst musing he lean’d the dark valley  
above,  
Thro’ the warm land were wand’ring the spirits of  
love.

A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirr’d ;  
In the blossom’d acacia the lone cricket chirr’d ;  
The scent of the roses fell faint o’er the night,  
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in  
light.

Repose, and yet rapture ! that pensive wild nature  
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature !  
Like a maiden withdrawn in her chamber, while  
yet

*Her lip with her first lover’s first kiss is wet,  
In the bloom of its virginal blossom, who hears  
Her full heart beat loud in her small rosy ears,*

Through the exquisite silence of passionate trance,  
Whilst, reveal'd in the light of youth's tender  
romance,  
Life's first great discovery dreamily moves  
Into sweet self-surprise — she is loved, and she  
loves !

## XXXVII.

A stone's throw from thence, through the large  
lime-trees peep'd,  
In a garden of roses, a white chalet, steep'd  
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to  
the lawn ;  
The casements were open ; the curtains were  
drawn ;  
Lights stream'd from the inside ; and with them  
the sound  
Of music and song. In the garden, around  
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,  
Half-a-dozen young men and young women were  
met.  
Light, laughter, and voices, and music, all stream'd  
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window  
there seem'd  
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,  
Of a white dress, a white neck, and soft dusky  
hair,  
Which Lord Alfred remember'd . . . a moment  
or so  
It hover'd, then pass'd into shadow ; and slow  
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,  
Floated forth, and a voice unforgetten thus sung : —  
' Hear a song that was born in the land of my  
birth !  
' The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,  
' And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth  
' *Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the  
sea.*

‘ And this ship is a world. She is freighted with  
souls,

‘ She is freighted with merchandise : proudly she  
sails

‘ With the Labour that stores, and the Will that  
controls

‘ The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

‘ From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the  
rose,

‘ And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,

‘ Past the harbours of Traffic, sublimely she goes,

‘ Man’s hopes o’er the world of the waters to  
bear !

‘ Where the cheer from the harbours of Traffic is  
heard,

‘ Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the  
sight,

‘ O’er the rose, o’er the cedar, there passes a bird ;

‘ ‘Tis the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

‘ And that bird, bright and bold as a Poet’s desire,

‘ Roams her own native heavens, the realms of  
her birth.

‘ There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a  
fire,

‘ And her plumage hath never been sullied by  
earth.

‘ And the mariners greet her ; there’s song on  
each lip,

‘ For that bird of good omen, and joy in each  
eye.

‘ And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the  
ship,

‘ *Together go forth over ocean and sky.*

‘ *Fast, fast fades the land ! far the rose-gardens  
flee, .*

- ‘ And far fleet the harbours. In regions unknown  
‘ The ship is alone on a desert of sea,  
‘ And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.
- ‘ In those regions unknown, o’er that desert of air,  
‘ Down that desert of waters — tremendous in  
wrath —  
‘ The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,  
‘ And cleaves, through the waves of the ocean,  
his path.
- ‘ And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the  
wave,  
‘ Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales;  
‘ And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,  
‘ Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.
- ‘ Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been  
heard,  
‘ For it never before hath been given to sight;  
‘ On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,  
‘ The Paradise Bird, never known to alight!
- ‘ The bird which the mariners bless’d, when each lip  
‘ Had a song for the omen that gladden’d each  
eye,  
‘ The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship  
‘ From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in  
the sky.
- ‘ But the mariners heed not the bird any more.  
‘ They are felling the masts — they are furling  
the sails;  
‘ Some are working, some weeping, and some  
wrangling o’er  
‘ Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.
- ‘ *Souls of men are on board; wealth of man in the  
hold;*

- ‘ And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his  
prey ;  
‘ And who heeds the bird ? “ Save the silk and  
the gold ! ”  
‘ And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps  
away !
- ‘ Poor Paradise Bird ! on her lone flight once more  
‘ Back again in the wake of the wind she is  
driven —  
‘ To be whelm’d in the storm, or above it to soar,  
‘ And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in  
heaven !
- ‘ And the ship rides the waters, and weathers the  
gales :  
‘ From the haven she nears the rejoicing is  
heard.  
‘ All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,  
‘ Save a child, sitting lonely, who misses — the  
Bird ! ’ \*

\* The idea which is imperfectly embodied in this song was suggested to me by a friend, to whom I am indebted for so much throughout this poem, that I gladly avail myself of this passing opportunity, in acknowledging the fact, to record my grateful sense of it. I name him not. When he reads these words his heart will comprehend what is in mine while I write them.

## CANTO III.

## I.

RISE, O Muse, in the wrath of thy rapture divine,  
And sweep with a finger of awe every line,  
Till it tremble and burn, as thine own glances  
burn

Through the vision thou kindest! wherein I discern

All the unconscious cruelty hid in the heart  
Of mankind; all the limitless grief we impart,  
Unawares, to each other; the limitless wrong  
We inflict without heed, as we hurry along  
In this boisterous pastime of life. So we toy  
With the infinite! so, in our sport we destroy  
What we made not, and cannot remake thro' the  
whole

Of existence, those feelings which are, in the soul,  
Future heavens or hells! so we recklessly scorn,  
In each other, Life's solemn significance!

Worn

In a too careless breast, lo! the flower, left to  
bloom

Round the desolate moral inscribed on a tomb —  
'Youth, Hope, Beauty, Innocence, Tenderness,  
Trust,'

(So it runs,) 'this was Woman. Behold, it is  
dust!

'This was Woman: it lived and it breath'd: and  
it said

"*I love, and love dies not.*" Behold, it is dead.

'This was woman: our hearts at her feet we laid  
down;

'It is dust: and we trample it under our own:  
*Are we doom'd then, O sister, O brother, to war*

On each other for ever? half-lives as we are!  
Still impell'd to unite, still from union self-thrust,  
Like those poor wounded worms we see writhe in  
the dust,

Blindly groping about, with the instinct of pain,  
For each other, their maim'd life to mingle again.  
We, that need help and healing, O sister, O  
brother,

Are we cannibals still of the hearts of each other?  
In despite of its much-boasted science and art,  
Is this civilized world still a savage at heart?  
Mourn, O Muse, — not indeed for the wrongs Life  
hath felt —

These have mourners enough in the world; mourn,  
and melt

Into tears else unshed, for the wrongs Life hath  
wrought,

By the transient desire and the trivial thought;  
For the man (be he lover or loved) that doth jest  
With the passionate earnest of love in the breast  
Of a woman; for the woman (or maiden, or wife)  
That doth sport with the passionate earnest of life  
In the heart of a man. Mourn, O Muse, for the  
soul,

When her truest seem truthless, her fairest so  
foul!

I have seen falsehood veil'd by the virginal cheek  
Of a child; I have seen the immaculate, meek  
Desdemona false; Imogen wanton; have seen  
Juliet faithless; and she, the chaste Ithacan Queen,  
Choose a swine from her suitors, and from his  
embrace

Rise to write to her lord that she pined for his  
face

In a tender Ovidian strain! I have seen

The young bride shrewdly eyeing the cypress  
between

*Her first year's orange blossoms, and blush not to  
crave*

From the couch of a bridegroom the price of his  
grave !

Blush, O Muse, blush and burn ! I have seen, I  
have seen,

At the feet of a wanton with false-modest mien,  
The giants of Genius and Power enchain'd,  
While paler and paler their foreheads have waned.

Yes ! this life is the war of the False and the True.  
Yet this life is a truth ; though so complex to  
view

That its latent veracity few of us find !

But alas ! for that man who, in judging mankind  
From a false point of view, should disloyally deal  
With the truth the world keeps, though the world  
may conceal.

Ay, the world but a frivolous phantasm seems,  
And mankind in the mass but as motes in sun-  
beams ;

But when Fate, from the midst of this frivolous  
nature,

Selects for her purpose some frail human creature,  
And the Angel of Sorrow, outstretching a wan  
Forefinger to mark him, strikes down from the  
man

The false life that hid him, the man's self appears  
A solemn reality : Him the dread spheres  
Of heaven and hell with their forces dispute,  
And dare *we* be indifferent ? Hence, and be  
mute,

Light scoffer, vain trifler ! Through all thou dis-  
cernest

A Greater than thou is at work, and in earnest ;  
And he who dares trifle with man, trifles too  
With man's awful Maker.

There's terror that's true  
In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,  
Amidst *music and mirth* lured and wiled by some  
*devil*,



Follow'd ever one mask through the mad mas-  
querade,

Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('tis said),  
He unmask'd with a kiss, the strange lady, and  
stood

Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.  
In this Masque of the Passions call'd life there's no  
human

Emotion, though mask'd, or in man or in woman,  
But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at  
last

Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.  
For Truth is appalling and eltrich, as seen  
By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen  
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our  
life.

Alas ! why is Genius for ever at strife  
With the world, which, despite the world's self, it  
ennobles ?

Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles  
And offends the effete life it comes to renew ?  
'Tis the terror of Truth ! 'tis that Genius is true !

## II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)  
Was a woman of genius : not genius, indeed,  
In the abstract, nor yet in the abstract mere wo-  
man :

But THE WOMAN OF GENIUS, essentially human,  
Yet for ever at war with her own human nature ;  
The genius, now fused in the woman, gave stature  
And strength to her sex ; now the woman, at war  
With the genius, impeded its flight to the star.  
As it is with all genius, the essence and soul  
Of her nature was truth. When she sought to  
control,

Or to stifle, or palter in aught with that truth,  
*'Twas when life seem'd to grant it no issues.*

Her youth

One occasion had known, when, if fused in another,  
That tumult of soul, which she now sought to smother,

Finding scope within man's larger life, and controll'd

By man's clearer judgment, perchance might have roll'd

Into channels enriching the troubled existence

Which it now only vex'd with an inward resistance.

But that chance fell too soon, when the crude sense of power

Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,

Was too fierce and unfashion'd to fuse itself yet

In the life of another, and served but to fret

And to startle the man it yet haunted and thrall'd ;

And that moment, once lost, had been never recall'd.

But it left her heart sore : and to shelter her heart  
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art

Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies

Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,

A weapon, at once, and a shield, to conceal

And defend all that women can earnestly feel.

Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,

She felt frighten'd at times by her very success ;

She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars :

Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars

If they keep us behind prison-windows : impassion'd

Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashion'd

Out of glittering trifles around it, unfurl'd

Wings of desolate flight, and soar'd up from the world.

*In this dual identity possibly lay*

The secret and charm of her singular sway  
Over men of the world. 'Twas the genius, all  
warm

With the woman, that gave to the woman a charm  
Indescribably strange; there appear'd in her life  
A puzzle, a mystery — something at strife  
With such men, which yet thrall'd and enchain'd  
them in part,

And, perplexing the fancy, still haunted the heart.  
That intensity, earnestness, depth, or veracity,  
Which starward impell'd her with such pertinacity  
As turns to the loadstar the needle, reflected  
Itself upon others: she therefore affected,  
Unconsciously, those amongst whom she was  
thrown,

As the magnet the metal it neighbours.

Unknown

To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,  
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.

Unlike man's stern intellect, which, while it stands  
Aloof from the minds that it sways and commands  
By a power wrench'd from labour, sublimely com-  
pels

All around and beneath the high sphere where it  
dwells

To its fix'd and imperial purpose; in her  
The soft spirit of woman that seeks to confer  
Its sweet self on the loved, had her life but been  
blended

With some man's whose heart had her own compre-  
hended,

All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly  
thrown.

For him she had then been ambitious alone;

For him had aspired; in him had transfused

All the gladness and grace of her nature; and used

*For him only the spells of its delicate power:*  
*Like the ministering fairy that brings from her*  
*bower*

To some mage all the treasures, whose use the fond  
elf,  
More enrich'd by her love, disregards for herself.  
But standing apart, as she ever had done,  
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding  
none  
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's  
power,  
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,  
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she  
hurl'd  
Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the  
world.

And, indeed, her chief fault was this unconscious  
scorn  
Of the world, to whose usages woman is born.  
Not the WORLD, where that word implies all hu-  
man nature,  
The Creator's great gift to the needs of the crea-  
ture :  
That large heart, with its sorrow to solace, its care  
To assuage, and its grand aspirations to share :  
But the world, with encroachments that chafe and  
perplex,  
With its men against man, and its sex against sex.  
' *Ah, what will the world say?*' with her was a  
query  
Never utter'd, or utter'd alone with a dreary  
Rejection in thought of the answer before  
It was heard : hence the thing which she sought  
to ignore  
And escape from in thought, she encounter'd in act  
By the blindness with which she opposed it.  
In fact,  
Had Lucile found in life that communion which  
links  
All that *woman but dreams, feels, conceives of,*  
*and thinks,*

With what man acts and is, — concentrating the  
 strength  
 Of her genius within her affections, at length  
 Finding woman's full use through man's life, by  
 man's skill  
 Readapted to forms fix'd for life, the strong will  
 And high heart which the world's creeds now reck-  
 lessly braved,  
 From the world's crimes the man of the world  
 would have saved ;  
 Reconciled, as it were, the divine with the human,  
 And, exalting the man, have completed the woman.

But the permanent cause why she now miss'd and  
 fail'd  
 That firm hold upon life she so keenly assail'd,  
 Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place  
 The world and the woman opposed face to face,  
 Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to  
 stir,  
 Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

For the world is a nettle ; disturb it, it stings :  
 Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two  
 things,  
 If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle :  
 Avoid it, or crush it. She crush'd not the nettle ;  
 For she could not ; nor would she avoid it : she  
 tried  
 With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,  
 And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing  
 To trample the world without feeling its sting. i

### III.

One lodges but simply at Serchon ; yet, thanks  
 To the season that changes for ever the banks  
*Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light*  
*cloud*  
*O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud*

Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring  
down

The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,  
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,  
And the bluebells that purple the dapple-grey  
scaur,

One sees with each month of the many-faced year  
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.

The *châlet* where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers  
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,  
In a garden of roses, reveal'd to the road,  
Yet withdrawn from its noise: 'twas a peaceful  
abode.

And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like  
hoods

Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resin-  
ous woods.

The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended  
The steep garden paths, every odour had blended  
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,  
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded  
slopes:

A light breeze at the windows was playing about,  
And the white curtains floated, now in, and now  
out.

The house was all hush'd when he rang at the  
door,

Which was open'd to him in a moment or more  
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head  
shined

In the sun like a cocoa-nut polish'd in Ind,  
'Neath the snowy *foularde* which about it was  
wound.

## IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.  
He remember'd the nurse of Lucile. The old  
*dame,*

*Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when  
he came,*

With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,  
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.  
The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee  
When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,  
In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,  
To pine, a pale flowret, in great Paris town.  
She had sooth'd the child's sobs on her breast when  
she read

The letter that told her her father was dead.  
An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,  
Had studied men, cities, laws, wars, the abysses  
Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.  
He had wander'd the world through, by land and  
by sea,  
And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,  
Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill  
To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave  
Her displeasure. Thrice shipwreck'd, and cast by  
the wave

On his own quick resources, they rarely had fail'd  
His command : often baffled, he ever prevail'd,  
In his combat with fate : to-day flatter'd and fed  
By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread.  
The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came  
Of a family ruin'd, yet noble in name.  
He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France ;  
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Free-  
lance,  
Had wander'd, in search of it, over the world,  
Into India.

But scarce had the nomad unfurl'd  
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile  
Of a Rajah (whose court he controll'd for a while,  
And whose council he prompted and govern'd by  
stealth) ;

Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,  
*Who died giving birth to this daughter, before*  
*He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.*  
*His fortune, which went to his orphan, perchance*

Had secured her a home with his sister in France,  
 A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile  
 Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal  
 The half-Eastern blood, which appear'd to be-  
                     queath

(Reveal'd now and then, though but rarely, be-  
                     neath

That outward repose that conceal'd it in her)  
 A something half wild to her strange character.  
 The old nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-  
                     hearted,

At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.  
 But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,  
 When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been  
                     married

To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,  
 With no claim on her tears — she had wept as a  
                     bride.

In those days the old negress, now shaking her head  
 So vaguely, had laugh'd with '*le petit Alfred*,'  
 Now she seem'd to remember him not. With a  
                     sigh

Thought Lord Alfred, 'So changed in a few years  
                     am I?'

Then he pass'd on. 'Your mistress expects me.'  
                                             The crone

Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him  
                     alone.

## v.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace  
 Rested silence and perfume. No sound reach'd  
                     the place.

In the white curtains waver'd the delicate shade  
 Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze  
                     play'd.

O'er the smooth wooden floor, polish'd dark as a  
                     glass,

*Fragrant white Indian matting allow'd you to pass.*



In light olive baskets, by window and door,  
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the  
floor,

Rich wild flowers, pluck'd by Lucile from the hill,  
Seem'd the room with their passionate presence to  
fill :

Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed ;  
The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed ;  
And the frail saponaire, and the tender blue-bell,  
And the purple valerian, — each child of the fell  
And the solitude flourish'd, fed fair from the source  
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course,  
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,  
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

## VI.

This white, little, fragrant apartment, 'tis true,  
Seem'd unconsciously fashion'd for some rendez-  
vous ;

But you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,  
'Twas the shrine of a life chaste and calm. Half  
unclosed

In the light slept the flowers : all was pure and at  
rest ;

All peaceful ; all modest ; all seem'd self-possess'd,  
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace  
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place ;  
Not a scarf, not a shawl : on the mantelpiece  
merely

A nosegay of flowers, all wither'd or nearly,  
And a little white glove, that was torn at the wrist.  
Impell'd by an impulse, too strong to resist,  
Lord Alfred caught up, with a feverish grasp,  
The torn glove, and flung it aside with a gasp ;  
It seem'd like the thrill of a final farewell.

He took up the nosegay, without bloom or smell,  
And inaudibly, bitterly, mutter'd, or sigh'd

*Some rebuke to the flowers ere he laid it aside.*  
*Had Lucile by design left the dead flowers there ?*

The torn glove? I know nothing. I cannot declare.

## VII.

He turn'd to the window. A cloud pass'd the sun.  
The breeze lifted itself up the leaves, one by one.  
Just then Lucile enter'd the room, undiscern'd  
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was  
turn'd,  
In a strange reverie.

The time was, when Lucile,  
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal  
The rapture, the fear, which wrench'd out every  
nerve  
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.  
And now — she gazed at him, calm, smiling, — per-  
chance  
Indifferent.

## VIII.

Indifferently turning his glance,  
Alfred Vargrave encounter'd that gaze unaware.  
O'er a boddice snow-white stream'd her soft dusky  
hair ;  
A rose-bud half-blown in her hand ; in her eyes  
A half pensive smile.

A sharp cry of surprise  
Escap'd from his lips: then, embarrass'd and vex'd,  
He saluted the Countess; and sought, much per-  
plex'd,  
For some trivial remark — the conventional  
phrases —  
Irreproachable manners, appropriate praises.  
But in spite of himself, some unknown agitation,  
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,  
Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit ;  
Overtook, and entangled, and paralysed it.  
That wit *so* complacent and docile, that ever  
*Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavour,*

Ready coin'd, and availably current as gold,  
 Which, secure of its value, so fluently roll'd  
 In free circulation from hand on to hand  
 For the usage of all, at a moment's command ;  
 For once it rebell'd, it was mute and unstirr'd,  
 And he look'd at Lucile without speaking a word.

## IX.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face  
 On whose features he gazed had no more than a  
     trace  
 Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.  
 Yes! the face he remember'd was faded with tears:  
 Grief had famish'd the figure, and dimm'd the dark  
     eyes,  
 And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with  
     sighs.  
 And that tender, and gracious, and fond *coquetterie*  
 Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be  
 Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress  
 Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,  
 In the careless toilette of Lucile, — then too sad  
 To care aught to her changeable beauty to add, —  
 Lord Alfred had never admired before!  
 Alas! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,  
 Had neglected herself, never heeding, nor thinking  
 (While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were  
     shrinking)  
 That sorrow can beautify only the heart —  
 Not the face — of a woman ; and can but impart  
 Its endearment to one that hath suffer'd. In truth  
 Grief hath beauty for grief ; but gay youth loves  
     gay youth.

## X.

The woman that now met, unshrinking, his gaze,  
*Seem'd to bask* in the silent but sumptuous blaze  
*Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the*  
     *first,*

which returns when the bud to the blossom hath  
burst

despite of the stormiest April. Lucile  
had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal  
the homage which none but a churl would with-  
hold —

at caressing and exquisite grace — never bold,  
or present — which just a few women possess.  
In a healthful repose, undisturb'd by the stress  
of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn  
freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.  
Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere  
the luxurious proportions of youth ; and her hair —  
once shorn as an offering to passionate love —  
now floated or rested redundant above  
her airy pure forehead and throat ; gather'd loose  
under which, by one violet knot, the profuse  
black-white folds of a cool modest garment reposed,  
displayed faint by the breast they half hid, half dis-  
closed.

And her simple attire thus in all things reveal'd  
the fine art which so artfully all things conceal'd.

XI.

And Alfred, who never conceiv'd that Lucile  
should have look'd so enchanting, felt tempted to  
kneel

her feet, and her pardon with passion implore ;  
the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore  
his pride and the bitterness needed to meet  
his occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XII.

'adam,' — thus he began with a voice reassur'd —  
you see that your latest command has secur'd  
my immediate obedience — presuming I may  
consider my freedom restor'd from this day' —

And thought, said Lucile, with a smile gay yet  
sad,

‘ That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.  
‘ Indeed ! . . . in my chains have you rested till  
now ?

‘ I had not so flatter’d myself, I avow ! ’

‘ For Heaven’s sake, Madam,’ Lord Alfred replied,  
‘ Do not jest ! has this moment no sadness ? ’ he  
sigh’d.

‘ ’Tis an ancient tradition,’ she answer’d, ‘ a tale  
‘ Often told — a position too sure to prevail  
‘ In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,  
‘ When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet re-  
mote  
‘ Wherein of necessity each would recall  
‘ From the other the poor foolish records of all  
‘ Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded,  
seem’d bliss,  
‘ Should we write as we wrote ? But one thinks  
not of this !  
‘ At twenty (who does not at twenty ?) we write  
‘ Believing eternal the frail vows we plight ;  
‘ And we smile with a confident pity, above  
‘ The vulgar results of all poor human love :  
‘ For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,  
‘ Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,  
‘ Is novel to us — that ’tis novel to earth,  
‘ And will prove the exception, in durance and  
worth,  
‘ To the great law to which all on earth must in-  
cline.  
‘ The error was noble, the vanity fine !  
‘ Shall we blame it because we survive it ? ah, no ;  
‘ ’Twas the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not  
so ? ’

## XIII.

*She look’d at Lord Alfred. No word he replied ;  
He was startled, and felt stunn’d, scared, stupefied.*

This cold, keen philosophy, trenchant as steel,  
On the lips of a woman so young as Lucile,  
Appall'd him. He seem'd to remember her yet  
A child — the weak sport of each moment's regret,  
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,  
The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the  
    strife

And the tumult of passion ; the tremulous toy  
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.  
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of  
    all

The illusions of life — lift, unflinching, the pall  
From the bier of the dead Past — that woman so  
    fair,

And so young, yet her own self-survivor ; who  
    there

Fraced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold !  
Twas a picture that touch'd him with pain to  
    behold.

He himself knew — none better — the things to  
    be said

Upon subjects like this. Yet he bow'd down his  
    head :

He had not the courage, he dared not decide  
To aid that frail hand to the heart's suicide.

## XIV.

As thus, with a trouble he could not command,  
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his  
    hand,

You know me enough,' she continued, ' or what  
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,  
Lord Alfred ?) enough of my nature, to know  
That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago  
A foolish affection, I do not recall

From those motives of prudence which actuate all  
Or most women, when their love ceases. Indeed  
If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need  
*But remind you that ten years these letters have  
    rested*

‘Unreclaim’d in your hands, nor should I have  
 suggested  
 ‘Their return, if I had not, from all that I hear,  
 ‘Fear’d those letters might now (might they not ?)  
 interfere  
 ‘With the peace of another.’

## XV.

Lord Alfred looked up,  
 (His gaze had been fix’d on a blue Sèvres cup  
 With a look of profound connoisseurship — a smile  
 Of singular interest and care, all this while)  
 He look’d up, and look’d long in the face of Lucile,  
 To mark if that face by a sign would reveal  
 At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous pain.  
 He look’d keenly and long, yet he look’d there in  
 vain.

The face was calm, cheerful, reserv’d, and precise ;  
 ‘Is this woman,’ he thought, ‘changed to diamond  
 or ice ?’

‘You are generous, Madam,’ he murmur’d at last,  
 And into his voice a light irony pass’d,  
 ‘If these be indeed the sole motives you feel.’

‘What others but these could I have ?’ said Lucile.

‘I might,’ answer’d Alfred, ‘presume, if I *did*  
 ‘Wish to call into question (which Heaven forbid !)  
 ‘The generous feelings that find me — believe—  
 ‘Most grateful — these letters you wish’d to receive  
 ‘From personal motives—’

She laugh’d at the word.

‘Were it not somewhat late to have these ? O my  
 lord,

‘Had I waited, indeed, for . . . (what is it you  
 say ?)

‘*Such “personal motives” (your words) till to-day,*  
 ‘*Would you not, of a truth, have experienced one*  
*touch*

‘Of dreadful remorse?’

‘You embarrass me much,’

Replied Alfred. He spoke with assurance, for here  
He recover’d his ground, and had nothing to fear.  
He had look’d for reproaches, and fully arranged  
His forces. But straightway the enemy changed  
The position.

## XVI.

‘Come!’ gaily she here interposed,  
With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed

Some depth in her nature he never had known,  
While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,  
‘Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain

‘Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in  
vain.

‘From me not a single reproach can you hear.

‘I have sinn’d to myself — to the world — nay, I  
fear

‘To you chiefly. The woman who loves should,  
indeed,

‘Be the guide of the man that she loves. She  
should heed

‘Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,

‘But his interest whose fate her own interest in-  
spires;

‘And, rather than seek to allure, for her sake,

‘His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake

‘Of impossible destinies, use all her art

‘That his place in the world find its place in her  
heart.

‘I, alas! — I perceived not this truth till too late;

‘I tormented your youth, I have darken’d your  
fate.

‘Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake

‘Of its long expiation!’



## XVII.

Lord Alfred, awake,  
 Seem'd to wander from dream on to dream. In  
     that seat  
 Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet  
 His accuser, he found himself turn'd by some  
     change,  
 As surprising and all unexpected as strange,  
 To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was  
     sought.  
 All the world's foolish pride in that moment was  
     nought ;  
 He felt all his plausible theories posed ;  
 And, thrill'd by the beauty of nature disclosed  
 In the pathos of all he had witness'd, his head  
 And his knee he bow'd humbly, and faltering said,  
 ' Ah, Madam ! I feel that I never till now  
 ' Comprehended you — never ! I blush to avow  
 ' That I have not deserved you.'

## XVIII.

' No, no !' answer'd she ;  
 ' When you knew me, I was not what now I may be.  
 ' Could the past be transferr'd, were I now to re-  
     ceive  
 ' The love of a man whom the world loves, be-  
     lieve' —

(Thought Alfred, — ' O hypocrite ! loved and adored  
 ' By a duke, a grand seigneur, the fashion's gay  
     lord !')

' Believe,' she resumed, ' if I had to dispose  
 ' Of his life in the world where his fame should  
     repose,  
 ' *I think I should know how to help his career,*  
 ' *And to add to its happiness — not, as I fear*  
 ' *I once sought, to destroy it.*'

‘Is this an advance?’

Thought Lord Alfred, and raised with a passionate  
glance

The hand of Lucile to his lips.

’Twas a hand

White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.

The hand of a woman is often, in youth,

Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat grace-  
less in truth;

Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,

Or as Sorrow has cross’d the life-line in the palm?

XIX.

The more that he look’d, that he listen’d, the more  
He discover’d perfections unnoticed before.

Whatever of strangeness, and wildness, and pride

She retained in her character, now undescried

In the depths of her being, nought outward be-  
tray’d;

Not a look that she look’d, not a word that she said.

Less salient than once, less poetic perchance,

This woman who thus had survived the romance

That had made him its hero, and breathed him its  
sighs,

Seem’d more charming a thousand times o’er to his  
eyes.

Alfred Vargrave forgot, ere an hour was thus gone,

All the years which between their existence had  
flown.

Nay, the whole of his life was forgotten. He seem’d

With some woman unknown till that hour; he half  
deem’d

That they met in that hour for the first time; and  
thought

That love at first sight from such eyes might be  
caught.

XX.

*Together they talk’d of the years since when last*

They parted, contrasting the present, the past.  
 Yet no memory marr'd their light converse. Lucile  
 Question'd much, with the interest a sister might  
     feel,  
 Of Lord Alfred's new life, — of Miss Darcy — her  
     face,  
 Her temper, accomplishments — pausing to trace  
 The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.  
 Of herself, she recounted with humour and wit  
 Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands  
 She had seen, and the books she had read, and the  
     hands  
 She had shaken.

In all that she said there appear'd  
 An amiable irony. Laughing, she rear'd  
 The temple of reason, with ever a touch  
 Of light scorn at her work, reveal'd only so much  
 As there gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals  
     bear,  
 Thro' the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.  
 But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,  
 To that soul, whose experience had paralysed bliss,  
 A benignant indulgence, to all things resign'd,  
 A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,  
 Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint  
 And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

## XXI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fled by.  
 To each novel sensation spontaneously  
 He abandon'd himself with that ardour so strange  
 Which belongs to a mind grown accustom'd to  
     change.  
 He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,  
 To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart;  
 But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,  
*More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavour.*  
*When he deem'd he had touch'd on some chord in*  
     *her being,*

At the touch, it dissolved, and was gone. Ever  
fleeing

As ever he near it advanced, when he thought  
To have seized, and proceeded to analyse aught  
Of the moral existence, the absolute soul,  
Light as vapour the phantom escaped his control.

## XXII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.  
In the passage without a quick footstep there  
stirr'd.

At the door knock'd the negress, and thrust in her  
head,

'The Duke de Luvois had just enter'd,' she said,  
'And insisted'—

'The Duke!' cried Lucile (as she spoke  
The Duke's footsteps approaching a light echo  
woke).

'Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,'  
As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,  
'I have business of private importance.'

There came  
O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that  
name,

An invincible sense of vexation. He turn'd  
To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discern'd  
On her face an indefinite look of confusion.  
On his mind instantaneously flash'd the conclusion  
That his presence had caused it.

He said, with a sneer  
Which he could not repress, 'Let not *me* interfere  
'With the claims on your time, lady! when you  
are free

'From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see  
'And to wait on you later.'

The words were not said  
Ere he wish'd to recall them. He bitterly read  
The *mistake* he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.  
Inclining her head, as in haughty reply,

More reproachful perchance than all utter'd rebuke,  
 She said merely, resuming her seat, 'Tell the Duke  
 'He may enter.'

And vex'd with his own words and hers,  
 Alfred Vargrave bow'd low to Lucile de Nevers,  
 Pass'd the casement and enter'd the garden. Before  
 His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

## XXIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,  
 Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With  
 dull tone

Of importance, thro' cities of rose and carnation,  
 Went the bee on his business from station to station.  
 The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around;  
 Its incessant small voices like stings seem'd to sound  
 On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the  
 hot

Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirr'd from the spot.  
 The last look of Lucile still bewilder'd, perplex'd,  
 And reproach'd him. The Duke's visit goaded and  
 vex'd

And disturb'd him. At length, he resolved to  
 remain

In the garden, and call on the Countess again ;  
 As soon as the Duke went. In short, he would  
 stay,

Were it only to know when the Duke went away.  
 But just as he form'd this resolve, he perceived  
 Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved  
 And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.  
 Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for  
 some nook

Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden  
 retreat.

They had not yet seen him. The sound of their  
 feet -

*And their voices had warn'd him in time. They  
 were walking*

Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was  
 talking  
 With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance  
 That they barr'd the sole path to the gateway. No  
 chance  
 Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-  
 dipp'd  
 In thick foliage, an harbour stood near. In he  
 slipp'd,  
 Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they  
 pass'd,  
 Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last  
 They paused, and sat down on a bench in the  
 shade,  
 So close that he could not but hear what they said.

## XXIV.

## THE COUNTESS.

*Comment, Monsieur le Duc ?*

## THE DUKE.

Ah, forgive ! . . . I desired  
 So deeply to see you to-day. You retired  
 So early last night from the ball . . . this whole  
 week  
 I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . . speak,  
 Speak, Lucile, and forgive me ! . . . I know that  
 I am  
 A rash fool — but I love you ! I love you, Madame,  
 More than language can say ! Do not deem, O  
 Lucile,  
 That the love I no longer have strength to conceal  
 Is a passing caprice ! It is strange to my nature,  
 It has made me, unknown to myself, a new crea-  
 ture.  
 It is not the Duke de Luvois that here kneels  
 To the Countess Lucile. 'Tis a soul that appeals  
 To a soul, 'tis a heart that cries out for a heart,

'Tis the man you yourself have created in part,  
 That implores you to sanction and save the new life  
 Which he lays at your feet with this prayer — Be  
     my wife ;  
 Stoop, and raise me !

Lord Alfred could scarcely restrain  
 The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain  
 With which he had heard this. As tho' to some  
     wind

The leaves of the hush'd, windless laurels behind  
 The Duke and the Countess were suddenly stirr'd.  
 The sound half betray'd him. They started. He  
     heard

The low voice of Lucile ; but so faint was its tone  
 That her answer escaped him.

The Duke hurried on,  
 As though in remonstrance with what had been  
     spoken.

'Nay, I know it, Lucile ! but your heart was not  
     broken

'By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.

'Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be  
     loved.

'You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mis-  
     take

'What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make

'Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever  
     your heart

'May have suffer'd of yore, this can only impart

'A pity profound to the love which I feel.

'Hush ! hush ! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lu-  
     cile.'

'You know all, Duke ?' she said ; 'well then, know  
     that, in truth,

'*I have learn'd from the rude lesson taught to my  
     youth*

'*From my own heart to shelter my life ; to mistrust*

‘The heart of another. We are what we must,  
‘And not what we would be. I know that one  
hour  
‘Forestalls not another. The will and the power  
‘Are diverse.’  
‘O, madam!’ he answer’d, ‘you fence  
‘With a feeling you know to be true and intense.  
‘’Tis not *my* life, Lucile, that I plead for alone :  
‘If your nature I know, ’tis no less for your own.  
‘That nature will prey on itself; it was made  
‘To influence others. Consider,’ he said,  
‘You have genius, ambition — what scope for them  
here ?  
‘Gifts less noble to *me* give command of that sphere  
‘In which genius is power. Such gifts you despise ?  
‘But you do not disdain what such gifts realise !  
‘I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown —  
‘A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown —  
‘All my life at your feet I lay down — at your feet  
‘A heart which for you, and you only, can beat.’

THE COUNTESS.

That heart, Duke, that life — I respect both. The  
name  
And position you offer, and all that you claim  
In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel  
To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you —

THE DUKE.

Lucile !

THE COUNTESS.

I ask you to leave me —

THE DUKE.

You do not reject ?

THE COUNTESS.

*I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.*



THE DUKE.

You ask me ? —

THE COUNTESS.

— The time to reflect.

THE DUKE.

Say — One word !

May I hope ?

What the Countess replied was not heard  
By Lord Alfred ; for just then she rose, and moved  
on.

The Duke bow'd his lips o'er her hand, and was  
gone.

XXV.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And when  
Alfred Vargrave reel'd forth to the sunlight again,  
He just saw the white robe of the Countess recede  
As she enter'd the house.

Scarcely conscious<sup>7</sup> indeed  
Of his steps, he too follow'd, and enter'd.

XXVI.

He enter'd

Unnoticed ; Lucile never stirr'd : so concentr'd  
And wholly absorbed in her thoughts she appear'd.  
Her back to the window was turn'd. As he near'd  
The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.  
Her dark eyes were fix'd on the ground. Pale,  
dejected,

And lost in profound meditation she seem'd.

Softly, silently, over her droop'd shoulders stream'd  
The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm  
And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm  
*Alfred Vargrave* let fall a hand icily cold  
And clammy as death, all too cruelly told  
*How far he had been from her thoughts.*

## XXVII.

All his cheek

Was disturb'd with the effort it cost him to speak.  
 'It was not my fault. I have heard all,' he said.  
 'Now the letters — and farewell, Lucile! When  
     you wed  
 'May' —

The sentence broke short, like a weapon  
     that snaps  
 When the weight of a man is upon it.

'Perhaps,'

Said Lucile (her sole answer reveal'd in the flush  
 Of quick colour which up to her brows seem'd to  
     rush  
 In reply to those few broken words), 'this farewell  
 'Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can  
     tell ?

'Let us part without bitterness. Here are your  
     letters.

'Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!' —  
 She laugh'd, as she said this, a little sad laugh.

And stretch'd out her hand with the letters. And  
     half

Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust  
 His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he  
     thrust

The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,  
 Bow'd his head, and departed without a reply.

## XXVIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world  
 Were gone back to the world. And the world's  
     self was furl'd

Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand  
 Droop'd, and from it, unloosed from their frail  
     silken band,

Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scatter'd, and  
     shed

At her feet — life's lost blossoms ! Dejected, her  
head  
On her bosom was bow'd. Her gaze vaguely  
stray'd o'er  
Those strewn records of passionate moments no  
more.  
From each page to her sight leapt some word that  
belied  
The composure with which she that day had denied  
Every claim on her heart to those poor perish'd  
years.  
They avenged themselves now, and she burst into  
tears.

## CANTO IV.

## LETTER FROM COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

## I.

‘ Bigorre, Thursday.  
 ‘ TIME up, you rascal ! Come back, or be hang’d.  
 ‘ Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued  
 ‘ For a whole hour this morning about you. The  
   deuce !  
 ‘ What on earth can I say to you ? — nothing’s of  
   use.  
 ‘ And the blame of the whole of your shocking  
   behaviour  
 ‘ Falls on *me*, sir ! Come back, — do you hear ? —  
   or I leave your  
 ‘ Affairs, and abjure you for ever. Come back  
 ‘ To your anxious betroth’d ; and perplex’d  
                                   ‘ COUSIN JACK.’

## II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John  
 To increase his impatience to fly from Serchon.  
 All the place was now fraught with sensations of  
   pain  
 Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in  
   vain.  
 A wild instinct warn’d him to fly from a place  
 Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,  
 Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavour  
 To think of Matilda, her image for ever  
 Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.  
 From the ground which he stood on he felt himself  
   reel.  
 Scared, *alarm’d* by those feelings to which, on the  
   *day*

Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,  
 When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for  
     assistance  
 At what was, till then, the great fact in existence,  
 'Twas a phantom he grasp'd.

## III.

Having sent for his guide,  
 He order'd his horse, and determin'd to ride  
 Back forthwith to Bigorre.

Then, the guide, who well knew  
 Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo  
 Lay a league from Serchon ; and suggested a track  
 By the lake to Bigorre, which, traversing the back  
 Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between  
 Two long vallies ; and thinking, ' Perchance change  
     of scene  
 ' May create change of thought,' Alfred Vargrave  
     agreed,  
 Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full  
 speed.

## IV.

His guide rode beside him.

The king of the guides !  
 The great Bernàrd himself ! ever boldly he rides,  
 Ever gaily he sings ! For to him, from of old,  
 The hills have confided their secrets, and told  
 Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o'  
     the woods ;  
 Where the izard flits fine through the cold soli-  
     tudes ;  
 Where the bear lurks *perdu* ; and the lynx on his  
     prey  
 At nightfall descends, when the mountains are  
     grey ;  
*Where the sassafras blooms, and the bluebell is*  
     *born,*  
*And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn ;*

here the source of the waters is fine as a thread,  
 now the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread;  
 here the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie  
     asleep,  
 hence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts  
     leap;  
 and, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales  
 have whisper'd to him all their thousand love-tales;  
 he has laugh'd with the girls, he has leap'd with  
     the boys;  
 ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys  
 his existence untroubled by envy or strife,  
 while he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.  
 And so lightly he sings, and so gaily he rides,  
 that BERNARD LE SAUTEUR is the king of all  
     guides!

V.

But Bernard found, that day, neither song nor  
     love-tale,  
 nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail  
 to arouse from his deep and profound reverie  
 in that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slacken'd their speed,  
 and the prospect that met them was wondrous  
     indeed!  
 The breezy and pure inspirations of morn  
 breath'd about them. The scarp'd ravaged moun-  
     tains, all worn  
 the torrents, whose course they watch'd faintly  
     meander,  
 were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.  
 They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,  
 and wound through a region of green wilder-  
     nesses;  
 the waters went wirbling above and around,  
 the forests hung heap'd in their shadows profound.

Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,  
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,  
Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux  
They mark'd ; and far down in the sunshine below,  
Half dipp'd in a valley of airiest blue,  
The white happy homes of the village of Oo,  
Where the age is yet golden.

And high over head  
The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.  
Red granite and quartz, in the alchemic sun,  
Fused their splendours of crimson and crystal in  
one ;

And deep in the moss gleam'd the delicate shells,  
And the dew linger'd fresh in the heavy harebells ;  
The large violet burn'd ; the campanula blue ;  
And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peer'd  
through

The wild rhododendrons and thick sassafras ;  
And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass ;  
And high up, and higher, and highest of all,  
The secular phantom of snow !

O'er the wall  
Of a deep and circuitous valley below,  
That aerial spectre, reveal'd in the glow  
Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye  
And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky,  
And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.  
Only reach'd by the first rosy ripple of light,  
And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,  
Half unreal, like some mythological king  
That dominates all in a fable of old,  
Takes command of a valley as fair to behold  
As aught in old fables ; and, seen or unseen,  
Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene  
Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furl'd  
'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite  
world

*Of man's last aspirations, — unfathom'd, untrod,  
Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.*

## VII.

Meanwhile, as they journey'd, that serpentine road,  
Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly show'd  
A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.

Alfred Vargrave's heart beat; for he saw at a  
glance

The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next  
look

Show'd him, joyously ambling beside her, the  
Duke.

The rest of the troop which had thus caught his  
ken

He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).  
They were laughing and talking together. Soon  
after

By his sudden appearance suspending their laugh-  
ter,

He found himself close to Lucile.

She look'd scared.

A faint cry escaped her. Her horse slightly rear'd.

## VIII.

'You here!... I imagined you far on your way  
'To Bigorre!'... she exclaim'd. 'What has  
caused you to stay?'

'I *am* on my way to Bigorre,' he replied,

'But, since *my* way would seem to be *yours*, let  
me ride

'For one moment beside you.' And then, with a  
stoop,

At her ear, ... 'and forgive me!'

## IX.

By this time the troop  
Had regather'd its numbers.

The Countess was pale  
As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the  
vale.



The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,  
 For even one moment, the whole of the ride.  
 Alfred smiled, as he thought 'he is jealous of  
 her!'

And the thought of this jealousy added a spur  
 To his firm resolution and effort to please.  
 He talk'd much; he was witty, and quite at his  
 ease.

## X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed  
 the east

Half the day, gather'd closer, and rose and in-  
 creased

The air changed and chill'd. As though out of  
 the ground,

There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,  
 And the wind rose. The guides sniff'd, like cha-  
 mois, the air,

And look'd at each other, and halted, and there  
 Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The white  
 Aspens rustled, and turn'd up their frail leaves in  
 fright.

All announced the approach of the tempest.

Ere long,  
 Thick darkness descended the mountains among;  
 And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash  
 Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a  
 gash.

The rain fell in large heavy drops. And anon  
 Broke the thunder.

The horses took fright, every one.  
 The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.  
 The guides shouted. The band was obliged to  
 alight;

And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walk'd  
 blind

*To the darkness before from the darkness behind.*

## XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains !  
He fills  
The crouch'd hollows and all the oracular hills  
With dread voices of power. A roused million or  
more  
Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar  
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake  
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves livid the  
lake.  
And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder de-  
scends  
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain  
ends ;  
He howls as he hounds down his prey ; and his  
lash  
Tears the hair of the timorous wild mountain ash,  
That clings to the rocks, with her garments all torn,  
Like a woman in fear ; then he blows his hoarse  
horn,  
And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and ter-  
ror,  
Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error  
Of mountain and mist.

## XII.

There is war in the skies !  
Lo ! the black-wingèd legions of tempest arise  
O'er those sharp splinter'd rocks that are gleaming  
below  
In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though  
Some seraph burn'd through them, the thunderbolt  
searching  
Which the black cloud unbosom'd just now. Lo !  
the lurching  
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem  
To waver above, in the dark ; and yon stream,  
*How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white*

And paralysed like there, appall'd at the sight  
Of the things seen in heaven !

## XIII.

Through the darkness and awe  
That had gather'd around him, Lord Alfred now  
saw,

Reveal'd in the fierce and evanishing glare  
Of the lightning that momentarily pulsed through the  
air,

A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,  
With her cheek coldly propp'd on her hand, — and  
as still

As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above  
The black lake beneath her.

All terror, all love  
Added speed to the instinct with which he rush'd  
on.

For one moment the blue lightning swathed the  
whole stone

In its lurid embrace : like the sleek dazzling snake  
That encircles a sorceress, charm'd for her sake  
And lull'd by her loveliness ; fawning, it play'd  
And caressingly twined round the feet and the  
head

Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm  
As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm  
Of the plangent and labouring tempest roll slow  
From the caldron of midnight and vapour below.  
Next moment, from bastion to bastion, all round,  
Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the  
sound

Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,  
And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile

## XIV.

*She started.* Once more, with its flickering wand  
*The lightning approach'd her.* In terror, her hand  
*Alfred Vargrave had seized within his ; and he fel*

The light fingers that coldly and lingeringly dwelt  
In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.

‘ See ! see !

‘ Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled  
yon tree !’

She exclaim’d, . . . ‘ like the passion that brings on  
its breath,

‘ To the being it embraces, destruction and death !

‘ Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you !’

‘ Lucile !

‘ I hear — I see — nought but yourself. I can feel

‘ Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights  
in vain

‘ With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet  
again

‘ Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above

‘ To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love, —

‘ And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,

‘ I humble my head and my heart. I entreat

‘ Your pardon, Lucile, for the past — I implore

‘ For the future your mercy — implore it with more

‘ Of passion than prayer ever breath’d. By the  
power

‘ Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,

‘ By the rights I have o’er you, Lucile, I demand’ —

‘ The rights !’ . . . said Lucile, and drew from him  
her hand.

‘ Yes, the rights ! for what greater to man may  
belong

‘ Than the right to repair in the future the wrong

‘ To the past ? and the wrong I have done you, of  
yore,

‘ Hath bequeathed to me all the sad right to restore,

‘ To retrieve, to amend ! I, who injured your  
life,

‘ Urge the right to repair it, Lucile ! Be my wife,

‘ My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,

‘ And accept, for the sake of what yet may give  
worth

‘ To my life, its contrition ! ’

## XV.

He paused, for there came  
O'er the cheek of the Countess a flush like the  
flame  
That illumin'd at moments the darkness o'erhead.  
With a voice faint and marr'd by emotion, she said,  
‘ And your pledge to another ? ’

## XVI.

‘ Hush, hush ! ’ he exclaim'd,  
‘ My honour will live where my love lives, un-  
shamed.  
‘ ’Twere poor honour indeed, to another to give  
‘ That life of which *you* keep the heart. Could I  
live  
‘ In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a  
lie ?  
‘ Alas, no ! *your* hand holds my whole destiny.  
‘ I can never recall what my lips have avow'd !  
‘ In your love lies whatever can render me proud.  
‘ For the great crime of all my existence hath been  
‘ To have known you in vain. And the duty best  
seen,  
‘ And most hallow'd — the duty most sacred and  
sweet  
‘ Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.  
‘ O speak ! and restore me the blessing I lost  
‘ When I lost you — my pearl of all pearls beyond  
cost !  
‘ And restore to your own life its youth, and restore  
‘ The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore !  
‘ Ere our brows had been dimm'd in the dust of the  
world,  
‘ *When our souls their white wings yet exulting  
unfurl'd !*

For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,  
The wild star of whose course its pale orbit out-  
ran,

Whom the formless indefinite future of youth,  
With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth  
I have wearily wander'd the world, and I feel  
That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,  
Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream  
Which, though follow'd for ever, for ever doth  
seem

As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore  
When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore  
Of life's untraversed ocean ! I know the sole  
path

To repose, which my desolate destiny hath,  
Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.  
And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,  
And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,  
The sublimity in you, as he whom at length  
These have saved from himself, for the truth they  
reveal

To his worship ? '

## XVII.

She spoke not ; but Alfred could feel  
The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,  
Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were  
half closed ;

but, under their languid mysterious fringe,  
A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge  
Of faint inward fire flush'd transparently through  
The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue  
Of the cheek, half averted and droop'd. The rich  
bosom

leaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose  
blossom

A bee is imprison'd, and struggles.

## XVIII.

Meanwhile

The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile  
Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold !  
O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,  
Rose and rested : while far up the dim airy crags,  
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,  
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat  
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet  
The powers of the night, which, now gathering  
afar,  
Had already sent forward one bright, signal star.  
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,  
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to  
wear,  
Had escaped ; and Lord Alfred now cover'd with  
kisses  
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.  
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not  
yet  
Had ceased falling around them ; when, splash'd,  
drench'd, and wet,  
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain  
course  
Approach'd them as fast as the road, and his horse,  
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had  
just now  
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow  
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had  
thrown ;  
But the Duke, who was agile, had leap'd to a  
stone,  
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which  
fills  
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,  
*Had scrambled again to his feet ; and now master  
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,  
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,*

The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his  
wrist,  
Bruised and bleeding.

## XIX.

If ever your feet, like my own,  
O reader, have travers'd these mountains alone,  
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract  
At the sound of the distant and dim cataract,  
In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,  
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedew'd with its  
spray,  
And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and roll'd,  
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heap'd over  
fold,  
Track'd the summits, from which every step that  
you tread  
Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the  
bed  
Of invisible waters, whose mystical sound  
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?  
And, labouring onwards, at last through a break  
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?

If you have, this description I might have with-  
held.

You remember how strangely your bosom has  
swell'd

At the vision reveal'd. On the over-work'd soil  
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpen'd by toil;  
And one seems, by the pain of ascending the  
height,  
To have conquer'd a claim to that wonderful sight.

## XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!  
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud and the  
snow!

*For o'er thee the angels have whiten'd their wings,*



And the thirst of the seraphs is quench'd at thy  
springs.

What hand hath, in heaven, upheld thine expanse ?  
When the breath of creation first fashion'd fair  
France,

Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow appalling,  
Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy basin while  
falling ?

Ere the mammoth was born hath some monster  
unnamed

The base of thy mountainous pedestal framed ?

And later, when Power to Beauty was wed,

Did some delicate fairy embroider thy bed

With the fragile valerian and wild columbine ?

## XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will keep mine ;

For once, gazing on thee, it flash'd on my soul,

All that secret ! I saw in a vision the whole

Vast design of the ages ; what was and shall be !

Hands unseen raised the veil of a great mystery

For one moment. I saw, and I heard ; and my  
heart

Bore witness within me to infinite art,

In infinite power proving infinite love ;

Caught the great choral chant, mark'd the dread  
pageant move —

The divine Whence and Whither of life ! But, O  
daughter

Of Oo, not more safe in the deep silent water

Is thy secret, than mine in my heart. Even so.

What I then saw and heard, the world never shall  
know.

## XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the vallies had closed,

The rain had ceased falling, the mountains reposed.

*The stars had enkindled in luminous courses  
Their slow-sliding lamps, when, remounting their  
horses,*

The riders re-travers'd that mighty serration  
Of rockwork. Thus left to its own desolation,  
The lake, from whose glimmering limits the last  
Transient pomp of the pageants of sunset had  
pass'd,  
Drew into its bosom the darkness, and only  
Admitted within it one image — a lonely  
And tremulous phantom of flickering light  
That follow'd the mystical moon through the night.

## XXIII.

It was late when o'er Serchon at last they descended.

To her chalet, in silence, Lord Alfred attended  
The Countess. At parting she whisper'd him low,  
'You have made to me, Alfred, an offer, I know  
'All the worth of, believe me. I cannot reply  
'Without time for reflection. Good night! — not  
. . . good bye.'

'Alas! 'tis the very same answer you made  
'To the Duc de Luvois but a day since,' he said.

'No, Alfred! the very same, no,' she replied.  
Her voice shook. 'If you love me, obey me.  
Abide

'My answer, to-morrow.'

## XXIV.

Alas, cousin Jack!  
You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your  
back

To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory  
Amongst thine own people.

I follow my story.

## CANTO V.

## I.

UP! — forth again, Pegasus! — ‘Many’s the slip,’  
Hath the proverb well said, ‘twixt the cup and  
the lip!’

How blest should we be, have I often conceived,  
Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!  
We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would  
be,

And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.  
So it will be, so has been, since this world began!  
And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man  
Is the part which he never hath fully play’d out:  
For the first and last word in life’s volume is —  
Doubt.

The face the most fair to our vision allow’d  
We encounter and lose in the crowd.  
Thought that most thrills our existence is one  
before we can frame it in language, is gone.

! the rustic still rests by the river,  
But the river flows on, and flows past him for ever!  
Who can sit down, and say . . . ‘What I will be,  
I will’?

Who stand up, and affirm . . . ‘What I was, I am  
still’?

Who is it that must not, if question’d, say . . .  
‘What

‘I would have remain’d, or become, I am not’?

We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside  
Our intrinsic existence. For ever at hide  
And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone

*Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,  
Do the Danaïds ply, ever vainly, the sieve.  
Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.*

Yet there's none so unhappy, but what he hath  
been

Just about to be happy, at some time, I ween ;  
And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,  
But what once, in his life, some minute circum-  
stance

Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss  
Which, missing it then, he for ever must miss.  
And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,  
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would  
have ;

But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,  
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too  
late.

The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,  
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.  
Yes ! there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the  
lip ;

But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,  
Though the cup may next moment be shatter'd, the  
wine

Spilt, one deep health I'll pledge, and that health  
shall be thine,

O being of beauty and bliss ! seen and known  
In the deeps of my soul, and possess'd there alone !  
My days know thee not ; and my lips name thee  
never.

Thy place in my poor life is vacant for ever.

We have met : we have parted. No more is re-  
corded

In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded  
To the man whom men know me, or deem me, to  
be.

But, far down, in the depths of my life's mystery,  
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,  
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it  
swells,

Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,  
'Mid the world's adamant and dim pedestals ;

At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for  
whom

The almandine glimmers, the soft samphires  
bloom) —

Thou abidest and reignest for ever, O Queen  
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen !  
My one perfect mistress ! my all things in all !  
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call :  
For the seraphs have named thee to me in my  
sleep,

And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.  
But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,  
And its thoughts are the purest — belov'd, thou art  
there !

And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,  
Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.  
The world gave thee not to me, no ! and the world  
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have  
furl'd

The wings of my spirit about thy bright head ;  
At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.  
Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art  
more.

And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.  
If life be not that which without us we find —  
Chance, accident, merely — but rather the mind,  
And the soul which, within us, surviveth these  
things,

If our real existence have truly its springs  
Less in that which we do, than in that which we  
feel,

Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel !  
For then, though I name thee not mistress or  
wife,

Thou art mine — and mine only, — O life of my  
life !

*And though many's the slip 'twixt the cup and the  
lip,  
Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,*

While there's life on the lip, while there's warmth  
in the wine,  
One deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall  
be thine !

## II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose  
Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes  
Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,  
And in fiery fusion commix'd earth and sky.  
Time cool'd it, and calm'd it, and taught it to go  
The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.  
The wind changeth and whirlleth continually :  
All the rivers run down and run into the sea :  
The wind whirlleth about, and is presently still'd :  
All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not fill'd :  
The sun goeth forth from his chambers : the sun  
Ariseth, and lo ! he descendeth anon.  
All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers  
Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.  
The great laws of life readjust their infraction,  
And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

## III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,  
To review the rash step he had taken, and feel  
What the world would have call'd '*his erroneous  
position.*'  
Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recognition :  
Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out  
On the coat which we once wore with pleasure no  
doubt,  
Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.  
Ev'ry spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

## IV.

He felt ill *at ease* with himself. He could feel  
*Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.*

Her eyes, when they parted — her voice, when  
     they met,  
 Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted.  
     And yet,  
 Though, exulting, he deem'd himself loved, where  
     he loved,  
 Through his mind a vague self-accusation there  
     moved.

O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise  
 The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes  
 So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,  
 That his heart fail'd within him. In vain did he  
     find

A thousand just reasons for what he had done :  
 The vision that troubled him would not be gone.  
 In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,  
 ' Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth ;  
 ' And her heart is too young to have deeply in-  
     volved  
 ' All its hopes in the tie which must now be dis-  
     solved.  
 ' 'Twere a false sense of honour in me to suppress  
 ' The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess.  
 ' And what reason have I to presume this poor life  
 ' Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,  
 ' And without what alone might endear it to her,  
 ' Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,  
 ' That a woman need weep to resign it ? 'Twill be  
 ' The brief, angry surprise of a moment, and she,  
 ' Who can never lack suitors more worthy than I,  
 ' In a year will recall, without even a sigh,  
 ' This broken engagement.

    ' It is not as though  
 ' I were bound to some poor village maiden, I  
     know,  
 ' Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon  
     earth,  
 ' Or to whose simple fortunes my own could give  
     worth.

‘ Matilda, in all the world’s gifts, will not miss  
‘ Aught that I could procure her. ’Tis best as  
it is !’

## V.

In vain did he say to himself, ‘ When I came  
‘ To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame  
‘ Or reproach myself for in the thoughts of my  
heart.  
‘ I could not foresee that its pulses would start  
‘ Into such strange emotion on seeing once more  
‘ A woman I left with indifference before.  
‘ I believed, and with honest conviction believed,  
‘ In my love for Matilda. I never conceived  
‘ That another could shake it. I deem’d I had  
done  
‘ With the wild heart of youth, and look’d hope-  
fully on  
‘ To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,  
‘ Which I sought in the love that I vow’d to my  
wife.  
‘ Poor child ! she shall learn the whole truth. She  
shall know  
‘ What I knew not myself but a few days ago.  
‘ The world will console her — her pride will sup-  
port —  
‘ Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,  
‘ There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss  
‘ When once we have parted. ’Tis best as it is !’

## VI.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas !  
He yet felt unconvinced that *’twas* best as it was.  
Out of reach of all reason, for ever would rise  
That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes  
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,  
That they harrow’d his heart and distracted his  
mind.



## VII.

And then, when he turn'd from these thoughts to  
Lucile,  
Though his heart rose enraptured, he could not  
but feel

A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind  
All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,  
Which he saw and revered in her, something un-  
known

And unseen in her nature still troubled his own.  
He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized  
Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,  
In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,  
Or completely possess'd, what, half-hidden from  
view,

Remain'd lofty and lonely in *her*.

Then, her life,  
So untamed, and so free! would she yield, as a  
wife,

Independence, long claim'd as a woman? Her  
name,

So link'd by the world with that spurious fame  
Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,  
In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt  
In the serious thoughts of a man! . . . . This  
reflection

O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejection,

From which he for ever escaped to the thought  
Doubt could reach not . . . . 'I love her, and all  
else is nought!'

## VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal  
Of the letter which reach'd him at last from Lucile.  
*At the sight of the very first word that he read,*  
*That letter dropp'd down from his hand like the*  
*dead*

LUCILE.

Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked a  
bare  
A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.  
He pass'd his hand hurriedly over his eyes,  
Bewilder'd, incredulous. Angry surprise  
And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him  
Anon  
He pick'd up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

'No, Alfred!

'If over the present, when last  
'We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the  
past,

'It hath now roll'd away, and our two paths are  
plain,

'And those two paths divide us.

'That hand which again  
Mine one moment hath clasp'd, as the hand of a  
brother,

That hand and your honour are pledged to  
another!

Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet  
'or that moment (now past!) I have made you  
forget

That was due to yourself and that other one.

Yes,  
ne the fault, and be mine the repentance! Not  
less,

now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,  
resaw not the sorrow involved in it.

'True,  
meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,  
ne! But, oh, deem not it was with the  
thought  
in heart to regain, or the past to awaken.

- ‘ No! believe me, it was with the firm and un-  
shaken  
‘ Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be  
‘ Without peril to *you*, although haply to me  
‘ The salvation of all my existence.  
‘ I own,  
‘ When the rumour first reach’d me, which lightly  
made known  
‘ To the world your engagement, my heart and my  
mind  
‘ Suffer’d torture intense. It was cruel to find  
‘ That so much of the life of my life, half unknown  
‘ To myself, had been silently settled on one  
‘ Upon whom but to think it would soon be a  
crime.  
‘ Then I said to myself, “ From the thralldom which  
time  
“ Hath not weaken’d there rests but one hope of  
escape.  
“ That image which Fancy seems ever to shape  
“ From the solitude left round the ruins of yore,  
“ Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.  
“ What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone  
“ Void of life, is the young hero born of my own  
“ Perish’d youth: and his image, serene and  
sublime,  
“ In my heart rests unconscious of change and of  
time.  
“ Could I see it but once more, as time and as  
change  
“ Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,  
“ See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth  
“ Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,  
“ The hard pupil of life and the world: then, oh,  
then,  
“ I should wake from a dream, and my life be  
*again*  
“ *Reconciled to the world; and, released from*  
*regret,*

‘ “ Take the lot fate accords to my choice.”

‘ So we met.

‘ But the danger I did not foresee has occur’d :

‘ The danger, alas, to yourself ! I have err’d.

‘ But happy for both that this error hath been

‘ Discover’d as soon as the danger was seen !

‘ We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,

‘ Shall be far from Serchon when this letter you  
read.

‘ My course is decided ; my path I discern :

‘ Doubt is over ; my future is fix’d now.

‘ Return,

‘ O return to the young living love ! Whence,  
alas !

‘ If, one moment, you wander’d, think only it was

‘ More deeply to bury the past love.

‘ And, oh !

‘ Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go

‘ On my far distant pathway through life, shall  
rejoice

‘ To treasure in memory all that your voice

‘ Has avow’d to me, all in which others have clothed

‘ To my fancy with beauty and worth your be-  
trothed !

‘ In the fair morning light, in the orient dew

‘ Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to  
renew

‘ All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,

‘ The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest  
youth ?

‘ Yes ! *you* will be happy. I, too, in the bliss

‘ I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this

‘ Proves me worthy your friendship. And so — let  
it prove

‘ That I cannot — I do not — respond to your love.

‘ Yes, indeed ! be convinced that I could not (no,  
no,

‘ Never, *never* !) have render’d you happy. And  
so,

‘ Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have  
plighted,  
‘ You would have endured, when the first brief,  
excited  
‘ Emotion was o’er, not alone the remorse  
‘ Of honour, but also (to render it worse)  
‘ Disappointed affection.

‘ Yes, Alfred ; you start ?

‘ But think ! if the world was too much in your  
heart,  
‘ And too little in mine, when we parted ten years  
‘ Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and  
tears !)  
‘ Have but deepen’d the old demarcations which  
then  
‘ Placed our natures asunder ; and we two again,  
‘ As we then were, would still have been strangely  
at strife.  
‘ In that self-independence which is to my life  
‘ Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,  
‘ Had our course through the world been henceforth  
side by side,  
‘ I should have revolted for ever, and shock’d,  
‘ Your respect for the world’s plausibilities, mock’d,  
‘ Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those  
‘ Social creeds which you live by.

‘ Oh ! do not suppose

‘ That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are  
right.  
‘ Best, then, all as it is !

‘ Deem these words life’s Good-night

‘ To the hope of a moment : no more ! If there  
fell

‘ Any tear on this page, ’twas a friend’s.

‘ So farewell

‘ To the past — and to you, Alfred Vargrave.

‘ LUCILE.’

## X.

So ended that letter.

The room seem'd to reel  
Round and round in the mist that was scorching his  
eyes

With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise,  
Seem'd to choke him; each word he had read, as it  
smote

Down some hope, seem'd to grasp, like a hand, at  
his throat,

And stifle and strangle him.

Gasping already  
For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,  
He pass'd from his chamber. He felt both op-  
press'd

And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,  
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, pass'd  
The long lime-trees of Serchon. His footsteps at  
last

Reach'd a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a  
wood :

It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.

By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,  
Stood a small ruin'd abbey. He reach'd it, sat  
down

On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and  
thistle,

And read over again that perplexing epistle.

## XI.

In re-reading that letter, there roll'd from his mind  
The raw mist of resentment which first made him.  
blind

To the pathos breath'd thro' it. Tears rose in his  
eyes,

And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seem'd  
to rise.

*The truth which he saw not the first time he read*

That letter, he now saw — that each word betray'd  
 The love which the writer had sought to conceal.  
 His love was received not, he could not but feel,  
 For one reason alone, — that his love was not free.  
 True ! free yet he was not : but could he not be  
 Free ere long, free as air to revoke that farewell,  
 And to sanction his own hopes ? he had but to  
 tell

The truth to Matilda, and she were the first  
 To release him : he had but to wait at the worst.  
 Matilda's relations would probably snatch  
 Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match  
 In which they had yielded, alone at the whim  
 Of their spoil'd child, a languid approval to him.  
 She herself, careless child ! was her love for him  
 aught

Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought  
 She last gave to her doll ? was she able to feel  
 Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile ?  
 He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh !  
 then,

He had but to fly to Lucile, and again  
 Claim the love which his heart would be free to  
 command.

But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,  
 Or even to seek, or to see her, before  
 He could say, ' I am free ! free, Lucile, to implore  
 ' That great blessing on life you alone can confer,'  
 'Twere dishonour in him, 'twould be insult to  
 her.

Thus, still with the letter outspread on his knee  
 He follow'd so fondly his own reverie,  
 That he felt not the angry regard of a man  
 Fix'd upon him ; he saw not a face stern and wan  
 Turn'd towards him ; he heard not a footstep that  
 pass'd

*And repass'd the lone spot where he stood, till at  
 last*

*A hoarse voice aroused him.*

He look'd up and saw,  
On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois.

## XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a look  
Of concentrated insolent challenge, the Duke  
Address'd to Lord Alfred some sneering allusion  
To 'the doubtless sublime reveries his intrusion  
' Had, he fear'd, interrupted. Milord would do  
better,  
' He fancied, however, to fold up a letter  
' The writing of which was too well known, in  
fact,  
' His remark as he pass'd to have fail'd to attract.'

## XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman was bent  
Upon picking a quarrel; and doubtless 'twas  
meant  
From *him* to provoke it by sneers such as these.  
A moment sufficed his quick instinct, to seize  
The position. He felt that he could not expose  
His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's, to those  
Idle tongues that would bring down upon him the  
ban  
Of the world, if he now were to fight with this  
man.  
And indeed, when he look'd in the Duke's haggard  
face,  
He was pain'd by the change there he could not  
but trace.  
And he almost felt pity.  
He therefore put by  
Each remark from the Duke with some careless  
reply,  
And coldly, but courteously, waving away  
The ill-humour the Duke seem'd resolved to dis-  
play,  
*Rose, and turn'd, with a stern salutation, aside.*



## XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path, made one  
stride

In advance, raised a hand, fix'd upon him his  
eyes,

And said . . .

‘Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with disguise!

‘I will own that I sought you a moment ago,

‘To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do so

‘Upon any excuse. I prefer to be frank.

‘I admit not a rival in fortune or rank

‘To the hand of a woman, whatever be hers

‘Or her suitor’s. I love the Comtesse de Nevers.

‘I believed, ere you cross’d me, and still have the  
right

‘To believe, that she would have been mine. To  
her sight

‘You return, and the woman is suddenly changed.

‘You step in between us: her heart is estranged.

‘You! who now are betroth’d to another, I  
know:

‘You! whose name with Lucile’s nearly ten years  
ago

‘Was coupled by ties which you broke: you! the  
man

‘I reproach’d on the day our acquaintance be-  
gan:

‘You! that left her so lightly, — I cannot believe

‘That you love, as I love, her; nor can I con-  
ceive

‘You, indeed, have the right so to love her.

‘Milord,

‘I will not thus tamely concede, at your word,

‘What, a few days ago, I believed to be mine!

‘I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in fine,

‘A rival you dare not despise. It is plain

‘That to settle this contest there can but remain

‘One way — need I say what it is?’

## XV.

Not unmoved  
With regretful respect for the earnestness proved  
By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave  
replied

In words which he trusted might yet turn aside  
The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,  
And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain  
To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst!)  
Had not been accepted.

## XVI.

‘Accepted! say first  
‘Are you free to have offer’d?’  
Lord Alfred was mute.

## XVII.

‘Ah, you dare not reply!’ cried the Duke. ‘Why  
dispute,  
‘Why palter with me? you are silent! and why?  
‘Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny  
‘’Twas from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,  
‘And the wish an ascendancy lost to recall,  
‘That you stepp’d in between me and her. If,  
milord,  
‘You be really sincere, I ask only one word.  
‘Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my  
part,  
‘I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,  
‘And there *can* be no quarrel between us. Say  
on!’  
Lord Alfred grew gall’d and impatient. This tone  
Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.  
‘You have not the right, sir,’ he said, ‘and still  
less  
‘The power, to make terms and conditions with  
*me*.  
‘*I refuse to reply.*’

## XVIII.

As diviners may see  
Fates they cannot avert in some figure occult,  
He foresaw in a moment each evil result  
Of the quarrel now imminent.

There, face to face,  
'Mid the ruins and tombs of a long-perish'd race,  
With, for witness, the stern Autumn Sky over-  
head,  
And beneath them, unnoticed, the graves, and the  
dead,  
Those two men had met, as it were on the ridge  
Of that perilous, narrow, invisible bridge,  
Dividing the Past from the Future, so small  
That, if one should pass over, the other must fall.

## XIX.

On the ear, at that moment, the sound of a hoof,  
Urged with speed, sharply smote ; and from under  
the roof  
Of the forest in view, where the skirts of it verged  
On the heath where they stood, at full gallop  
emerged  
A horseman.

A guide he appear'd, by the sash  
Of red silk round the waist, and the long leathern  
lash  
With the short wooden handle, slung crosswise  
behind  
The short jacket ; the loose canvas trouser, con-  
fined  
By the long boots ; the woollen capote ; and the  
rein,  
A mere hempen cord on a curb.

Up the plain  
*He wheel'd his horse, white with the foam on his  
flank,  
Leap'd the rivulet lightly, turn'd sharp from the  
bank,*

And, approaching the Duke, raised his woollen  
capote,  
Bow'd low in the selle, and deliver'd a note.

## xx.

The two men stood astonish'd. The Duke, with a  
gest  
Of apology, turn'd, stretch'd his hand, and pos-  
sess'd  
Himself of the letter, changed colour, and tore  
The page open, and read.

Ere a moment was o'er  
His whole aspect changed. A light rose to his  
eyes,  
And a smile to his lips. While with startled sur-  
prise  
Lord Alfred yet watch'd him, he turn'd on his  
heel,  
And said gaily, ' A pressing request from Lucile !  
' You are quite right, Lord Alfred ! fair rivals at  
worst,  
' Our relative place may perchance be reversed.  
' You are not accepted — not free to propose !  
' I, perchance, am accepted already ; who knows ?  
' I had warn'd you, milord, I should still persevere.  
' This letter — but stay ! you can read it — look  
here !'

## xxi.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and en-  
raged.  
But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged  
By aught that could sanction resentment. He said  
Not a word, but turn'd round, took the letter, and  
read . . .

## THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO THE DUC DE LUVOIS.

‘ Saint Saviour.

‘ Your letter, which follow’d me here, makes me  
stay

‘ Till I see you again. With no moment’s delay

‘ I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel

‘ Or profess, to come to me directly.

‘ LUCILE.’

## XXII.

‘ Your letter !’ He then had been writing to her !  
Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said,

‘ Sir,

‘ Do not let me detain you !’

The Duke smiled and bow’d ;  
Placed the note in his bosom ; address’d, half  
aloud,

A few words to the messenger. . . . ‘ Say your  
despatch

‘ Will be answer’d ere nightfall ;’ then glanced at  
his watch,

And turn’d back to the Baths.

## XXIII.

Alfred Vargrave stood still,  
Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.  
He turn’d to Lucile’s farewell letter to him,  
And read over her words ; rising tears made them-  
dim ;

‘ *Doubt is over : my future is fix’d now,*’ they said, .

‘ *My course is decided.*’ Her course ? what ! to  
wed

With this insolent rival ! With that thought there  
shot

*Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But  
not*

Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite  
excuse  
Those strange words to the Duke. She was free  
to refuse  
Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true :  
Even then though, this eager and strange rendez-  
vous  
How imprudent ! To some unfrequented lone  
inn,  
And so late (for the night was about to begin) —  
She, companionless there ! — had she bidden that  
man ?  
A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran  
Through his heart.

## XXIV.

At that moment he look'd up, and saw,  
Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,  
Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.  
The day was descending. He felt 'twould be  
night  
Ere that man reach'd Saint Saviour.

## XXV.

He walk'd on, but not  
Back toward Serchon : he walk'd on, but knew not  
in what  
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,  
He was walking ; but still he walk'd on without  
heed.

## XXVI.

The day had been sullen ; but, towards his de-  
cline,  
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.  
Darkly denting the red light reveal'd at its back,  
The old ruin'd abbey rose roofless and black.  
The *spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven*  
*floor*

Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of  
yore,  
The site of that refuge where, back to its God  
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,  
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest  
That now prey'd on his own !

## XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast  
With varying impulse divided and torn,  
He traversed the scant heath, and reach'd the  
forlorn  
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago  
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter ; and so  
He too enter'd. The light waned around him, and  
pass'd  
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast  
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,  
As the last light of day from the high wood de-  
clined,  
And the great forest sigh'd its farewell to the beam,  
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream  
Fell faintly.

## XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,  
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy  
grace !  
Thou false mistress of man ! thou dost sport with  
him lightly  
In his hours of ease and enjoyment ; and brightly  
Dost thou smile to his smile ; to his joys thou in-  
clinest,  
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor  
divinest.  
While he woos, thou art wanton ; thou lettest him  
love thee ;  
*But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot  
move thee.*

And at last, when he sickens and dies, what do  
thou ?

All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,  
And thou laughest and toiest with any new comer,  
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer !  
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart  
under

That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder !  
For all those—the young, and the fair, and the  
strong,

Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gaily and  
long,

And who now on thy bosom lie dead ? and their  
deeds

And their days are forgotten ! O hast thou no  
weeds

And not one year of mourning,—one out of the  
many

That deck thy new bridals for ever,—nor any  
Regrets for thy lost loves, conceal'd from the new,  
O thou widow of earth's generations ? Go to !  
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these  
things,

They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.



## CANTO VI.

I.

- ‘THE huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,  
‘And eltrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!  
‘The castle betokens a date long gone by.  
‘He crosses the courtyard with curious eye:  
‘He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet  
‘From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are  
set;  
‘And the whole place grows wilder, and wilder,  
and less  
‘Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,  
‘Strange portraits regard him with looks of sur-  
prise;  
‘Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;  
‘Strange epigraphs, blazon’d, burn out of the wall:  
‘The spell of a wizard is over it all.  
‘In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleep-  
ing.  
‘The sleep which for centuries she has been keep-  
ing.  
‘If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some love  
‘Whose lost golden locks the long grasses no  
cover:  
‘If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplor  
‘Some grief which the world cares to hear of  
more.  
‘But how fair is her forehead, how calm seem  
cheek!  
‘And how sweet must that voice be, if on  
would speak!  
‘He looks and he loves her; but knows!  
he!)  
‘... to unravel this old mystery?

' And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on  
the wall,

' The mute men in armour around him, and all

' The weird figures frown, as tho' striving to say,

" *Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-day!*

" *And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast*

" *To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possess'd*

" *By an Age not thine own!*"

' But unconscious is he,

' And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see

' Aught but *one* form before him!

' Rash, wild words are o'er;

' And the vision is vanish'd from sight evermore!

' And the grey morning sees, as it drearily moves

' O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves

' Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.

' Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the  
scheme

' Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart.'

And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.

It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;

Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by  
the young.

And the tale to each heart unto which it is known  
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

## II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part  
From strong physical health, and that vigour of  
heart

Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,  
From a generous vanity native to France,  
Threw himself, heart and soul, into all that allured  
Or engaged his sensations; nor ever endured  
To relinquish to failure whate'er he began,  
Or accept any rank, save the foremost.

A man

~~—~~tion by nature, he might have, no doubt,

Been in some sense a great man, had life but laid  
out

Any great field of action for him, or conceded  
To action a really great aim, such as needed  
Faith, patience, self-sacrifice.

But, on the whole,  
From circumstance partly beyond his control,  
His life was of trifles made up, and he lived  
In a world of frivolities. Still he contrived  
The trifles, to which he was wedded, to dower  
With so much of his own individual power  
(And mere pastime to him was so keen a pursuit),  
That these trifles seem'd such as you scarce 'could  
impute  
To a trifler.

Both he and Lord Alfred had been  
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which,  
seen

In Alfred, appear'd, from the light languid mood  
Of soft unconcern with which these were pursued,  
As amiable foibles, by strange involution,  
In Eugène, from their earnest, intense prosecution,  
Appear'd almost criminal.

Nevertheless,  
What in him gave to vice, from its pathos and  
stress,

A sort of malignity, might have perchance  
Had the object been changed by transposed cir-  
cumstance,

Given vigour to virtue. And therefore, indeed,  
Had his life been allied to some fix'd moral creed,  
In the practice and forms of a rigid, severe,  
And ascetic religion, he might have come near  
To each saint in that calendar which he now  
spurn'd.

In its orbit, however, his intellect turn'd  
*On a circle so narrow'd as quite to exclude*  
*A spacious humanity.* Therefore, both crude  
*And harsh his religion* would ever have been,

As shallow, presumptuous, narrow, and keen,  
 Was the trite irreligion which now he display'd.  
 It depended alone upon chance to have made  
 Persecutor of this man, or martyr. For, closed  
 In the man, lurk'd two natures the world deems op-  
 posed,  
 A Savonarola's, a Calvin's, alike  
 Unperceived by himself. It was in him to strike  
 At whatever the object he sought to attain,  
 Bold as Brutus, relentless as Philip of Spain,  
 And undaunted to march, in behalf of his brothers,  
 To the stake, or to light it, remorseless, for others.  
 The want of his life was the great want, in fact,  
 Of a principle, less than of power to act  
 Upon principle. Life without one living truth !  
 To the sacred political creed of his youth  
 The century which he was born to denied  
 All realisation. Its generous pride  
 To degenerate protest on all things was sunk ;  
 Its principles, each to a prejudice shrunk.  
 And thus from his youth he had lived, in constrain'd  
 Vain resistance, opposed to the race that then  
 reign'd  
 In the land of his birth, and from this cause alone  
 Exiled from his due sphere of action, and thrown  
 Into reckless inertness, whence, early possess'd  
 Of inherited wealth, he had learn'd to invest  
 Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees  
 from the cage  
 Which penury locks, in each vice of an age  
 All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,  
 Were to him illegitimate.

Thus, he appear'd  
 Neither Brutus nor Philip in action and deed,  
 Neither Calvin nor Savonarola in creed,  
 But that which the world chose to have him ap-  
 pear,—

The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere  
*Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages !* Still

'Twas this vigour of nature, and tension of will,  
Whence his love for Lucile to such passion had  
grown.

The moment in which with his nature her own  
Into contact had come, the intense life in her,  
The tenacious embrace of her strong character,  
Had seized and possess'd what in him was akin  
To the powers within her; and still, as within  
Her loftier, larger, more luminous nature,  
These powers assumed greater glory and stature,  
Her influence over the mind of Eugène  
Was not only strong, but so strong as to strain  
All his own to a loftier limit.

And so  
His whole being seem'd to cling to her, as though  
He divined that, in some unaccountable way,  
His happier destinies secretly lay  
In the light of her dark eyes. And still, in his  
mind,

To the anguish of losing the woman was join'd  
The terror of missing his life's destination,  
Of which, as in mystical representation,  
The love of the woman, whose aspect benign  
Guided, starlike, his soul seem'd the symbol and  
sign.

For he felt, if the light of that star it should miss,  
That there lurk'd in his nature, conceal'd, an abyss  
Into which all the current of being might roll,  
Devastating a life, and submerging a soul.

### III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, pass'd  
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight  
rode fast.

As a shade from the wing of some great bird ob-  
scene

*In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,  
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and  
scares*

Some traveller stray'd in the waste unawares,  
So that thought more than once darken'd over his  
heart

For a moment, and rapidly seem'd to depart.  
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which  
rose

Up the shaggy hill-side; and the quarrelling crows  
Clang'd above him, and clustering down the dim  
air

Dropp'd into the dark woods. By fits here and  
there

Shepherd fires faintly gleam'd from the valleys.  
Oh, how

He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now  
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent  
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was  
sent

From the torrent — before him a sound from the  
tracts

Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cata-  
racts,

And the loose earth and loose stones roll'd mo-  
mently down

From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.

The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,  
And the Powers of the night through the vast soli-  
tudes

Walk'd abroad and conversed with each other.  
The trees

Were in sound and in motion, and mutter'd like  
seas

In Elfland. The road through the forest was hol-  
low'd.

On he sped through the darkness, as though he  
were follow'd

Fast, fast by the Erl King!

The wild wizard-work  
Of the forest at last open'd sharp, o'er the fork  
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems

Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleam'd  
     like gems,  
 Broke the broad moon above the voluminous  
 Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!  
 With his horse reeking white, he at last reach'd  
     the door

Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar  
 Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,  
 Through which, ever roaring, there leap'd o'er the  
     limb

Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight  
 Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.  
 A balcony hung o'er the water. Above  
 In a glimmering casement a shade seem'd to move.  
 At the door the old negress was nodding her head  
 As he reach'd it. 'My mistress awaits you,' she  
     said.

And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter  
 He follow'd her silent. A few moments after,  
 His heart almost chok'd him, his head seem'd to  
     reel,

For a door closed — and he was alone with Lucile.

#### IV.

In a grey travelling dress, her dark hair uncon-  
     fined

Streaming o'er it, and toss'd now and then by the  
     wind

From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a  
     spire

From a brass lamp before her — a faint hectic  
     fire

On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever:  
 They seem'd to have wept themselves wider than  
     ever,

Those dark eyes — so dark and so deep!

Some supreme

*And concentrated effort within her to seem  
 Unassail'd by emotions which, nevertheless,*

Were betray'd on her cheek, touch'd to strange  
stateliness  
All her form. He sprang forward and cried,  
'You relent?  
'And your plans have been changed by the letter  
I sent?'  
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong in-  
ward strife.

207.

THE COUNTESS.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threatens man's  
life—  
Woman's honour.

THE DUKE.

208.  
209.

The last, madam, *not!*

THE COUNTESS.

Both. I glance  
At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood  
of France,  
As I read them! You say in this letter...

*'I know*

*'Why now you refuse me; 'tis (is it not so?)  
'For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,  
'And now trifles again with the heart you deny  
'To myself. But he shall not! By man's lust wild  
law,  
'I will seize on the right' (the right, Duc de Lu-  
vois!)  
'To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give  
'To the future its freedom. That man shall not  
live  
'To make you as wretched as you have made me!'*

THE DUKE.

Well, madam, in those words what word do you  
see  
That threatens the honour of woman?



## THE COUNTESS.

See!... what,  
 What word, do you ask? Every word! would  
 you not,  
 Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your  
 name  
 Was soil'd and dishonour'd by more than mere  
 shame  
 If the woman that bore it had first been the cause  
 Of the crime which in these words is menaced?  
 You pause!  
 Woman's honour, you ask? Is there, sir, no dis-  
 honour  
 In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,  
 Can shudder, and say, 'In that smile is a grave'?  
 No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right  
 you have  
 In the contest you menace. That contest but  
 draws  
 Every right into ruin. By all human laws  
 Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities  
 Of man's social honour!

The Duke droop'd his eyes.  
 'I obey you,' he said, 'but let woman beware  
 'How she plays fast and loose thus with human  
 despair  
 'And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours  
 was the right,  
 'When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope  
 quite,  
 'But you should from the first have done this, for  
 I feel  
 'That you knew from the first that I loved you.'

Lucile

*This sudden reproach seem'd to startle.*

She raised  
*A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed*

On them silent awhile. His own looks were down-cast.

Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm  
was now pass'd,

Pity crept, and perchance o'er her conscience a  
tear,

Falling softly, awoke it.

However severe,  
Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to  
her ?

Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,  
Which had seem'd, even when most impassion'd it  
seem'd,

Too self-conscious to lose all in love ? Had she  
deem'd

That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,  
So proud of the place the world gave him, held  
furl'd

In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide  
Might tug, till it snapp'd, that erect lofty pride ?

Were those elements in him, which once roused to  
strife

Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole  
life ?

There are two kinds of strength. One, the  
strength of the river,

Which through continents pushes its pathway for  
ever

To fling its fond heart in the sea ; if it lose

This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,

It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.

The other, the strength of the sea ; which supplies

Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws

The river's life into its own life, by laws

Which it heeds not. The difference in each case  
is this :

The river is lost, if the ocean it miss ;

If the *sea miss the river*, what matter ? The *sea*

*Is the sea still*, for ever. Its deep heart will be

Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore ;  
 Its sources are infinite ; still to the shore,  
 With no diminution of pride, it will say,  
 ' I am here ; I, the sea ! stand aside, and make  
     way ! '

Was his love, then, the love of the river ? and she,  
 Had she taken that love for the love of the sea ?

## V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had  
     been

Stern or haughty departed ; and, humbled in  
     mien,

She approach'd him, and brokenly murmur'd, as  
     tho'

To herself, more than him, ' Was I wrong ? is it  
     so ?

' Hear me, Duke ! you must feel that, whatever  
     you deem

' Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem

' I may claim on *one* ground — I at least am sincere.

' You say that to me from the first it was clear

' That you loved me. But what if this knowledge  
     were known

' At a moment in life when I felt most alone,

' And least able to be so ? a moment, in fact,

' When I strove from one haunting regret to re-  
     tract

' And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil

' Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes ? would you  
     still

' So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,

' If I hoped to see all this, or deem'd that I saw

' For a moment the promise of this in the plighted

' Affection of one who, in nature, united

' So much that from others affection might claim,

' *If only affection were free ?* Do you blame

' *The hope of that moment ?* I deem'd my heart  
     *free*

'From all, saving sorrow. I deem'd that in me  
 'There was yet strength to mould it once more to  
     my will,  
 'To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still  
 'Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you  
     refrain  
 'From hope? alas! I too then hoped!'

THE DUKE.

Yet again, say that thrice blessed word! say,  
 Lucile,  
 That you then deign'd to hope —

**THE COUNTESS.**

Yes! to hope I could feel,  
 And could give to you, that without which, all else  
     given  
 Were but to deceive, and to injure you even : —  
 A heart free from thoughts of another. Say, then,  
 Do you blame that one hope ?

THE DUKE.

**O Lucile !**

‘ Say again,’

She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,  
‘ Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own  
‘ To my heart that the hope it had cherish’d was  
o’er,  
‘ And for ever, I said to you then, “ Hope no  
more ” ?  
‘ I myself hoped no more !’

With but ill-suppress'd wrath  
The Duke answer'd . . . ' What, then ! he recrosses  
your path,

'This man, and you have but to see him, despite  
'Of his troth to another, to take back that light

‘Worthless heart to your own, which he wrong’d  
years ago!’

Lucile faintly, brokenly murmur’d . . . ‘No! no!  
‘Tis not that — but — alas! — but I cannot con-  
ceal

‘That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel

‘That I cannot accept all these gifts on your  
part, —

‘Rank — wealth — love — esteem — in return for  
a heart

‘Which is only a ruin!’

With words warm and wild,

‘Tho’ a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild

‘And restore it,’ the Duke cried; ‘tho’ ruin’d it  
be,

‘Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!’

He approach’d her. She shrank back. The grief  
in her eyes

Answer’d ‘No!’

An emotion more fierce seem’d to rise  
And to break into flame, as tho’ fired by the light  
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaim’d, ‘Am I  
right?’

‘You reject *me*! accept *him*?’

‘I have not done so,’

She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed, ‘Not yet  
— no!

‘But can you with accents as firm promise me

‘That you will not accept him?’

‘Accept? Is he free?

‘Free to offer?’ she said.

‘You evade me, Lucile,’

He replied; ‘ah, you will not avow what you feel!’

‘He might make himself free? Oh you blush —  
turn away!

‘*Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!*

‘*While you deign to reply to one question from  
me?*

‘I may hope not, you tell me : but tell me, may he ?

‘What ! silent ? I alter my question. If quite  
‘Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then ?’

‘He might,’

She said softly.

VI.

Those two whisper’d words, in his breast,  
As he heard them, in one deadly moment releast  
All that’s evil and fierce in man’s nature, to crush  
And extinguish in man all that’s good. In the rush  
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste  
And darken and devastate intellect, chased  
From its realm human reason. The wild animal  
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all  
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce  
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to  
pierce

And to rend, rush’d upon him : fierce jealousy,  
swell’d

By all passions bred from it, and ever impell’d  
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,  
And on others inflict its own pangs !

At that minute  
What pass’d thro’ his mind, who shall say ? who  
may tell

The dark thoughts of man’s heart, which the red  
glare of hell

Can illumine alone ?

He stared wildly around  
That lone place, so lonely ! That silence ! no  
sound

Reach’d that room, thro’ the dark evening air, save  
the drear

Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near !

It was midnight all round on the weird silent  
weather ;

Deep midnight in him ! They two,— lone and  
together,  
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him !  
The triumph and bliss of his rival flash'd o'er him.  
The abyss of his own black despair seem'd to ope  
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope  
Which Dante read over the city of doom.  
All the Tarquin pass'd into his soul in the gloom,  
And, uttering words he dared never recall,  
Words of insult and menace, he thunder'd down  
all  
The brew'd storm-cloud within him : its flashes  
scorch'd blind  
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind  
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control ;  
A torrent seem'd loosen'd within him. His soul  
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hiss'd  
And seeth'd in his heart.

## VII.

He had thrown, and had miss'd  
His last stake.

## VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place  
Where he rested o'er-awed : a saint's scorn on her  
face :  
Such a dread *rade retro* was written in light  
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that  
sight,  
Have sunk back abash'd to perdition. I know  
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had look'd so,  
She had needed no dagger next morning.  
She rose  
And swept to the door, like that phantom the  
snows  
*Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is  
gone*  
*And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.*

There she paused ; and, as though from immeasurable,

Insurpassable distance, she murmur'd —

‘ Farewell !

‘ We, alas ! have mistaken each other. One more

‘ Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o’er.

‘ Duc de Luvois, adieu !’

From the heartbreaking gloom  
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,  
He felt she was gone — gone for ever !

## IX.

No word,  
The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,  
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen  
accusation

As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,  
In which he remain’d.

‘ O return ; I repent !’

He exclaim’d ; but no sound through the stillness  
was sent,

Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,  
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet humm’d her night-  
hymn :

An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air

With a searching, and wistful, and questioning  
prayer.

‘ Return,’ sung the wandering insect. The roar  
Of the waters replied, ‘ Nevermore ! nevermore !’  
He walk’d to the window The spray on his brow  
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water  
below ;

The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound  
Of the torrent. The mountains gloom’d sullenly  
round.

A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.

O’er the dim balustrade all bewilder’d he hung,

Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering  
*blink*



Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink  
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and  
    listing  
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting  
Sharp horn of the grey gnat. Before he relin-  
    quish'd  
His unconscious employment, that light was ex-  
    tinguish'd.  
Wheels, at last, from the inn door aroused him.  
    He ran  
Down the stairs; reach'd the entrance. An old  
    stableman  
Was lighting his pipe in the doorway alone.  
Down the mountain, that moment, a carriage was  
    gone.  
He could hear it, already too distant to see.  
He turn'd to the groom there —

‘*Madame est partie*’.

x.

He sprang from the doorstep; he rush'd on; but  
    whither  
He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —  
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the  
    shelf  
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself!  
Till, exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and  
    moss  
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross  
Of grey stone stood for prayer by the woodside.  
    He sank  
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the  
    dank  
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them.  
    He knew  
That the night had divided his whole life in two.  
*Behind him a Past* that was over for ever;  
*Before him a Future* devoid of endeavour  
*And purpose.* He felt a remorse for the one,

Of the other a fear. What remain'd to be done ?  
Whither now should he turn ? turn again, as before,

To his old easy, careless existence of yore  
He could not. He felt that for better or worse  
A change had pass'd o'er him ; an angry remorse  
Of his own frantic failure and error had marr'd  
Such a refuge for ever. The future seem'd barr'd  
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread

To attain it. He realised then all the dread  
Conditions which go to a life without faith.  
The sole unseen fact he believed in was death.  
His soul, roused to life by a great human need,  
Now hunger'd and thirsted. What had he to feed  
Her hunger and thirst on ? That wise mother,  
France,

Had left to her spoil'd child of outgrown romance  
Not a toy yet unbroken.

From college to college  
She had gorged him crop full on her dead Tree of  
Knowledge ;  
But the lost Tree of Life — still the cherubim's  
sword

Fenced it from her false Edens. Belief was a  
word

To him, not a fact. He yet clung by a name  
To a dynasty fallen for ever. He came  
Of an old princely house, true through change to  
the race

And the sword of Saint Louis — a faith 'twere disgrace

To relinquish, and folly to live for ! Nor less  
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless  
Or to ban ; and the crozier his ancestors kneel'd  
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard  
field

With the Crescent) become, ere it reach'd him,  
tradition ;

A mere faded badge of a social position ;  
 A thing to retain and say nothing about,  
 Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from  
 doubt.

Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of  
 his youth

Wholly fail'd the strong needs of his manhood, in  
 truth !

And beyond them, what region of refuge ? what  
 field

For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,  
 In that civilized land ? or to thought ? or to  
 action ?

Blind deliriums, bewilder'd and endless distraction !

Not even a desert, not even the cell

Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell

The wild devil-instincts which now, unrepent,

Ran riot thro' that ruin'd world in his breast.

# XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight  
 Of a heaven scaled and lost ; in the wide arms of  
 night

O'er the howling abysses of nothingness ! There  
 As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him  
 prayer ;

But what had he to pray to ?

The winds in the woods,  
 The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,  
 Were in commune all round with the invisible  
 Power

That walk'd the dim world by Himself at that  
 hour.

But their language he had not yet learn'd — in  
 despite

*Of the much he had learn'd — or forgotten it quite,  
 With its once native accents. Alas ! what had he  
 To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony*

Of thanksgiving ? . . . A fiery finger was still  
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence.

His will,  
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild  
At its work of destruction within him. The  
child  
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,  
His own devil.

He sat on the damp mountain sod,  
And stared sullenly up at the dark sky.

The clouds  
Had heap'd themselves over the bare west in  
crowds

Of misshapen, incongruous portents. A green  
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between  
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge  
Of the grim world, gleam'd ghastly, as under some  
bridge,

Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown  
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown  
And unnamed; widens on into desolate lands.  
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands  
Dismantled and rent; and reveal'd, through a  
loop

In the breach'd dark, the blemish'd and half-broken  
hoop

Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon  
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.  
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,  
Darken'd round him. One object alone — that  
grey cross —

Glimmer'd faint on the dark. Gazing up, he de-  
scried

Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretch'd  
wide,

As though to embrace him.

He turn'd from the sight,  
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

## XII.

When the light  
 Of the dawn greyly flicker'd and glared on the  
     spent  
 Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent  
 To the need of some grief when its need is the  
     sorest,  
 He was sullenly riding across the dark forest  
 Toward Serchon.

Thus riding, with eyes of defiance  
 Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance  
 With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived

Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-  
     leaved

Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his  
     way,

The face of a man pale and wistful, and grey  
 With the grey glare of morning. Eugène de Lu-  
     vois,

With the sense of a strange second sight, when he  
     saw

That phantom-like face, could at once recognise,  
 By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes  
 Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,  
 With a stern sad inquiry fixed keenly on him.

And, to meet it, a lie leap'd at once to his own ;  
 A lie born of that lying darkness now grown  
 Over all in his nature ! He answer'd that gaze  
 With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys  
 More intensely than words what a man means,  
     convey'd

Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which  
     said,

*'I have triumph'd. The question your eyes would  
     imply  
 ' Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave !'*

And so he rode by,

And rode on, and rode gaily, and rode out of sight,  
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

## XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

J

## XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,  
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,  
By one wild hope impell'd, by one wild fear pur-  
sued,  
And led by one instinct, which seem'd to exclude  
From his mind every human sensation, save one —  
The torture of doubt — had stray'd moodily on,  
Down the highway deserted, that evening in which  
With the Duke he had parted; stray'd on, thro'  
the rich  
Haze of sunset, on into the gradual night,  
Which darken'd, unnoticed, the land from his  
sight,  
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed as-  
pect of all  
The wild scenery round him avail to recall  
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,  
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill  
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had  
hung  
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipp'd on fire from  
among  
The rent vapours, and sunk o'er the ridge of the  
world.  
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him un-  
furl'd,  
In one moment of splendour, the leagues of dark  
trees,  
And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.  
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on  
the face  
Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the  
place

Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This  
same track

The Duke must have travers'd, perforce, to get back  
To Serchon; not yet then the Duke had return'd!  
He listen'd, he look'd up the dark, but discern'd  
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.  
He knew that the night was approaching to day.  
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn  
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and  
forlorn,  
Reveal'd to him, riding toward Serchon, the Duke.  
'Twas then that the two men exchanged look for  
look.

## XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

## XVI.

He rush'd on. He tore  
His path through the thicket. He reach'd the inn  
door,

Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,  
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubb'd  
his eyes.

The Countess was gone. And the Duke?

The man stared  
A sleepy inquiry.

With accents that scared  
The man's dull sense awake, 'He, the stranger,' he  
cried,

'Who had been there that night!'

The man grinn'd, and replied,  
With a vacant intelligence, 'He, oh ay, ay!  
'He went after the lady.'

No further reply  
Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no  
more,

*Flung a coin to the man, and so turn'd from the  
door.*

‘What! the Duke then the night in that lone inn  
had pass’d?  
‘In that lone inn — with her!’ Was that look he  
had cast  
When they met in the forest, that look which re-  
main’d  
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explain’d?

## XVII.

The day was half turn'd to the evening, before  
He re-enter'd Serchon, with a heart sick and sore.  
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,  
By their voices attracted, distinguish'd the Duke,  
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,  
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.

Right

Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift  
sombre stride,  
Glided on. 'The Duke noticed him, turn'd, stepp'd  
aside,  
And, cordially grasping his hand, whisper'd low,  
'Oh, how right have you been! There can never  
be — no,

‘Never — any more contest between us! Milord,  
‘Let us henceforth be friends!’

Having utter'd that word,  
He turn'd lightly round on his heel, and again  
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that  
train

**Of his young imitators.**

Lord Alfred stood still,  
Rooted, stunn'd, to the spot. He felt weary and ill.  
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the  
soul

With a dull stifling anguish he could not control.  
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the  
crowd,

**The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud  
Some comment upon his gay humour that day?**



He never was gayer : what makes him so gay ?  
 'Tis, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune;  
 Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn  
 Has at last found a Mars — who, of course, shall  
     be nameless.

The vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blameless !  
 Hark ! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs  
 All his heart into tumult ? . . . Lucile de Nevers  
 With the Duke's coupled gaily, in some laughing,  
     light,

Free allusion ? Not so as might give him the right  
 To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet  
 To a trite and irreverent compliment set !

## XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul  
 Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did  
     there roll  
 Back again, back again, on its smooth downward  
     course  
 O'er his nature, with gather'd momentum and force,  
 THE WORLD.

## XIX.

'No !' he mutter'd, 'she cannot have sinn'd !  
 'True ! women there are (self-named women of  
     mind !)  
 'Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes !  
 'To choose and to leave — than the legalised stress  
 'Of the most brilliant marriage. But she — is she  
     so ?  
 'I will not believe it. Lucile ? Oh no, no !  
 'Not Lucile !  
     'But the world ? and, ah, what would it say ?  
 'O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day !  
 'The gossip's light question ! the slanderous jest !  
 '*She is right !* no, we could not be happy. 'Tis best  
 '*As it is.* I will write to her — write, O my heart !  
 'And accept her farewell. Our farewell ! must we  
     part —

‘Part thus, then — for ever, Lucile? Is it so?  
 ‘Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.  
 ‘’Twas a dream! we must waken!’

## XX.

With head bow’d, as though  
 By the weight of the heart’s resignation, and slow  
 Moody footsteps, he turn’d to his inn.

Drawn apart  
 From the gate, in the courtyard, and ready to start,  
 Postboys mounted, portmanteaus pack’d up and  
 made fast,

A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he pass’d.  
 He order’d his horse to be ready anon;  
 Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly pass’d  
 on,

And ascended the staircase, and enter’d his room.  
 It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom  
 Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light,  
 On the mantelpiece; there a large card caught his  
 sight —

A large card, a stout card, well printed and plain,  
 Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.  
 It gave a respectable look to the slab  
 That it lay on. The name was —

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,  
 For ’twas that of his own future uncle-in-law,  
 Mrs. Darcy’s rich brother, the banker, well known  
 As wearing the longest-phyllacteried gown  
 Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of;

A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the  
most of  
This world and the next ; having largely invested  
Not only where treasure is never molested  
By thieves, moth, or rust ; but on this earthly  
ball,  
Where interest was high, and security small.  
Of mankind there was never a theory yet  
Not by some individual instance upset :  
From old Homer's, who sang that the race may be  
found  
Now flourishing high, and now low on the ground,  
Like the leaves upon trees ; for one sometimes per-  
ceives  
Certain creatures that spring from the mud put  
forth leaves  
In high places ; and so to that verse in the Psalm  
Which declares that the wicked expand like the  
palm  
In a world where the righteous are stunted and  
pent,  
A cheering exception did Ridley present.  
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prosper'd his piety.  
The leader of every religious society,  
Christian knowledge he labour'd thro' life to pro-  
mote  
With personal profit, and knew how to quote  
Both the stocks and the Scripture, with equal ad-  
vantage  
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-  
Age.

## XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,  
A waiter his head thro' the doorway protruded ;  
' Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wish'd to speak.'  
*Alfred Vargrave* could feel there were tears on his  
cheek ;  
*He brush'd them away with a gesture of pride.*

He glanced at the glass; when his own face he  
eyed,

He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,  
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said  
'Sir Ridley may enter.'

In three minutes more  
That benign apparition appear'd at the door.  
Sir Ridley, releas'd for a while from the cares  
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs  
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,  
In company there with his sister and niece,  
Found himself now at Serchon — distributing tracts,  
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts  
For Exeter Hall; he was starting that night  
For Bigorre: he had heard, to his cordial delight,  
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting  
out

For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!  
Here some commonplace compliments as to 'the  
marriage'

Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his  
carriage

Was ready. A storm seem'd to threaten the  
weather:

If his young friend agreed, why not travel to-  
gether?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown  
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down  
Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause  
And a slight hesitation, the which seem'd to cause  
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answer'd — 'My  
dear

'Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here —

'Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair

'Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare

'My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this  
spot),

'Before I accept your kind offer.'

‘Why not?’

Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave,  
before

Sir Ridley observed it, had pass’d through the  
door.

A few moments later, with foot-steps revealing

Intense agitation of uncontroll’d feeling,

He was rapidly pacing the garden below.

What pass’d through his mind then is more than I  
know.

But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,

In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His  
tread

Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face

Betray’d there the least agitation. ‘The place

‘You so kindly have offer’d,’ he said, ‘I accept.’

And he stretch’d out his hand. The two travellers  
stepp’d

Smiling into the carriage.

And thus, out of sight,

They drove down the dark road, and into the  
night.

Who can answer where any road leads to?

#### XXII.

Alas!

There are so many questions of this kind that  
pass

My perplex’d comprehension, that were I to place  
them

On record, no volume would ever encase them.

There is heaven above us! we see it each day:

But what is the reason, can any one say,

Why what we see most of, we least comprehend?

Again, if our eyes on earth only we bend,

What suggests that strange doubt—‘This appeal-  
ing Creation,

‘Which says... Eat, drink, be full!... is it only  
temptation?’

Tho' divine Aphrodite should open her arms  
To our longing, and lull us to sleep on her charms;  
Tho' the world its full sum of enjoyment ensure us;  
Tho' Horace, Lucretius, and old Epicurus  
Sit beside us, and swear we are happy, what  
then?

Whence the answer within us which cries to these  
men,

' Let it be! you say well; but the world is too old  
' To rekindle within it the ages of gold;

' A vast hope hath travers'd the earth, and our  
eyes

' In despite of ourselves we must lift to the skies' ?  
And we lift them; and, lifting them, why do we  
find

That just when we vindicate sight, we are blind ?  
The Sir Riddleys, and other good men of that class,  
Bring spectacles, which not a raylet will pass;  
And seek to make clear to our vision the sun,  
By dimming his splendour, and smoking him dun.  
Then we turn to the children of this generation,  
Since the children of light deal in light's obscura-  
tion.

And O Chaos and Night! what at last do we mark  
By the gleam of their corpse-lights enkindling the  
dark ?

▲ Leibnitz transfigures clean from us our being :  
From whirlpool to whirlpool Descartes sets it flee-  
ing :

With that horrible face, Monsieur Arouet Voltaire  
Grins Theology out of its wits at one stare.

Not the first time a dwarf's sword a giant de-  
spatch'd ;

If it could not cut deep, it disfigured and scratch'd.

Next, man in the image of Jean Jacques we have,

A coward, a liar, a thief, and a slave !

Spinoza finds out for us God everywhere,

Saving just where we, else, could have found Him,  
in prayer ;

Locke (and few will dispute the assertion I ween)  
Is a great mechanician if man's a machine :

Kant, the great god of Nothing, takes pains to expound,

But his pains go for nothing — since nothing is found.

And of all human science the last word is this ;

Simply Nothing — the name scribbled o'er an abyss.

Is, then, Life one vast question without a reply ?

Must man, like Ulysses, with stopp'd ears sail by

Where'er Thought and Sense (Sirens only) sing to him

Songs over the deeps, that are sure to undo him

If once he should list to the music that mocks

The frail bark it lures to the whirlpools and rocks ?

And to exercise thought, or to satisfy sense,

To the Being that gave both is this an offence ?

Not mine be that creed, whosoever it be !

My heart humbly whispers this answer to me :

— True ! the more we gaze up into heaven, the more

Do we feel our gaze foil'd ; all attempt to explore

With earth's finite insight heaven's infinite gladness

Is baffled by something like infinite sadness.

What then, did man's limited science engirth

Heaven's limitless secret, were man's use on earth,

Where he just sees enough of the heaven above him

To be sure it is there, to confirm and approve him

In his work upon earth, whence he works his way to it ?

True ! the more that we seek earthly bliss, and pursue it,

*The more do we feel it inadequate, wholly*

*Insufficient for man ; a profound melancholy*

*At the bottom of all, like the whirlpool, absorbs,*

In its own sombre bosom, the brittle bright orbs  
Of those painted bubbles call'd pleasures. What  
then,  
If earth in itself were sufficient for men,  
Would be man's claim to that glorious promise  
which arches  
With Hope's fourfold bow the black path where he  
marches  
Triumphant to death, chanting boldly, 'Beyond !'  
Whilst invisible witnesses round him respond  
From the Infinite, till the great Pæan is caught  
By the echoes of heaven, and the chariot of  
Thought  
Rolls forth from the world's ringing walls to its goal,  
Urged by Faith, the bright-eyed charioteer of the  
soul ?

## XXIII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far  
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar  
' We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall  
die with us !'  
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply  
with us.  
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two  
men  
Began to converse, somewhat drowsily, when  
Alfred suddenly thought — ' Here's a man of ripe  
age,  
' At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,  
' Who looks happy, and therefore who must have  
been wise :  
' Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes  
' Some few of the reasons which make me believe  
' That I neither am happy nor wise ? 'twould relieve  
And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and  
doubt.'  
*For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.*



It was snapp'd up at once.

‘What is truth?’ jesting Pilate  
Ask'd, and pass'd from the question at once with a  
smile at

Its utter futility. Had he address'd it  
To Ridley MacNab, he at least had confess'd it  
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man  
Could more promptly have answer'd the sceptical  
Roman

Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!  
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,  
And forthwith on the pavement he'll sketch you  
the scheme

Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his  
theme!

Not afraid of Laplace, nor of Arago, he!  
He'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.  
Here's your sun — call him A; B's the moon; it is  
clear

How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear  
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask Laplace,  
(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to  
face!)

Their science in plain A B C to accord  
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a  
word

Will you get for your pains from their sad lips.  
Alas!

Not a drop from the bottle that's quite full will  
pass.

'Tis the half-empty vessel that freest emits  
The water that's in it. 'Tis thus with men's wits;  
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capa-  
bility

Of imparting to others a truth with facility  
Is proportion'd for ever with painful exactness  
*To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,  
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight  
Of the truth he imparts.* So small coins circulate

More freely than large ones. A beggar asks  
 alms,  
 And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms ;  
 But if every street charity shook an investment,  
 Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vest-  
 ment,  
 The length of the process would limit the act ;  
 And therefore the truth that's summ'd up in a  
 tract  
 Is most lightly dispensed.

As for Alfred, indeed,  
 On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffer'd to feed  
 By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,  
 That the two men thus talking continued to go  
 Onward somehow, together — on into the night —  
 The midnight — in which they escape from our  
 sight.

## XXIV.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its  
 place,  
 And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy  
 space  
 Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of  
 sight,  
 To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night ;  
 And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,  
 And the fair morn to all things new sanction ex-  
 tended,  
 In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,  
 Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the  
 sun.  
 And the world laugh'd.

It wanted but two rosy hours  
 From the noon, when they pass'd through the tall  
 passion-flowers  
 Of the little wild garden that dimpled before  
 The small house where their carriage now stopp'd  
 at Bigorre.

And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than  
 the dew,  
 With her white morning robe fitting joyously  
 through  
 The dark shrubs with which the soft hill-side was  
 clothed,  
 Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his  
 betrothed.

Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face  
 Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such  
 grace,

And radiant confidence, childlike delight,  
 That his whole heart upbraided itself at that  
 sight.

And he murmur'd, or sigh'd, 'Oh, how could I  
 have stray'd

'From this sweet child, or suffer'd in aught to  
 invade

'Her young claim on my life, though it were for  
 an hour,

'The thought of another?'

'Look up, my sweet flower!'

He whisper'd her softly, 'my heart unto thee

'Is return'd, as returns to the rose the wild bee!'

'And will wander no more?' laugh'd Matilda.

'No more,'

He repeated. And, low to himself, 'Yes, 'tis o'er!

'My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind

'To have dream'd that these clever Frenchwomen  
 of mind

'Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,

'Or sympathise with it?'

xxv.

And here the first part  
 Of this drama is over. The curtain falls furl'd  
*On the actors within it—the Heart, and the  
 World.*

*Woo'd and wooer have play'd with the riddle of  
 life, —*

Have they solved it ?

Appear ! answer, Husband and Wife

## XXVI.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,  
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of  
hers.

## THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO A FRIEND IN INDIA.

‘ ONCE more, O my friend, to your arms and your  
heart,  
‘ And the places of old . . . never, never to part !  
‘ ~~Once more to the palm, and the fountain !~~ Once  
more  
‘ To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of  
yore !  
‘ From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret  
‘ Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set ;  
‘ From the children that cry for the birth, and  
behold,  
‘ There is no strength to bear them — old Time is  
so old !  
‘ From the world's weary masters, that come upon  
earth  
Sapp'd and min'd by the fever they bear from  
their birth ;  
From the men of small stature, mere parts of a  
crowd,  
Born too late, when the strength of the world  
hath been bow'd ;  
ack, — back to the orient, from whose sunbright  
womb  
rang the giants which now are no more, in the  
the bloom  
and the beauty of times that are faded for ever !  
the palms ! to the tombs ! to the still Sacred  
River !

‘ Where I too, the child of a day that is done,  
‘ First leapt into life, and look’d up at the sun.  
‘ Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home  
‘ I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come !  
‘ Are the three intense stars that we watch’d night  
by night  
‘ Burning broad on the band of Orion as bright ?  
‘ Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,  
‘ When, as children, we gather’d the moonbeams  
for gold ?  
‘ Do you yet recollect me, my friend ? Do you  
still  
‘ Remember the free games we play’d on the hill,  
‘ ‘Mid those huge stones up-heap’d, where we reck-  
lessly trod  
‘ O’er the old ruin’d fane of the old ruin’d god ?  
‘ How he frown’d, while around him we carelessly  
play’d !  
‘ That frown on my life ever after hath stay’d,  
‘ Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast  
‘ From some vague supernatural grief in the past.  
‘ For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he  
frown’d,  
‘ To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting,  
had found,  
‘ In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss  
‘ Which his science divine seem’d divinely to miss.  
‘ Alas ! you may haply remember me yet  
‘ The free child, whose glad childhood myself I  
forget.  
‘ I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest :  
‘ I bear to you only a labouring breast :  
‘ My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurl’d  
‘ O’er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a  
world :  
‘ The dove from my bosom hath flown far away :  
‘ *It is flown, and returns not, though many a day*  
‘ *Have I watch’d from the windows of life for its*  
*coming.*

- ' Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming  
 ' I know not what Ararat rises for me  
 ' Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:  
 ' I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,  
 ' Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills:  
 ' But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my  
     breast  
 ' Wakes and whispers me on — to the East! to the  
     East!  
 ' Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or  
     find  
 ' The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of  
     mind?  
 ' Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?  
 ' Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?  
 ' Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake  
     hath rent?  
 ' Who shall bring forth the winds that within them  
     are pent?  
 ' To a voice who shall render an image? or who  
 ' From the heats of the noontide shall gather the  
     dew?  
 ' I have burn'd out within me the fuel of life.  
 ' Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet —  
     after strife.  
 ' I would sleep for a while. I am weary.  
                                                     ' My friend,  
 ' I had meant in these lines to regather, and send  
 ' To our old home, my life's scatter'd links. But  
     'tis vain!  
 ' My own touch seems to shatter the chaplet  
     again;  
 ' Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,  
 ' Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore  
 ' Whence too far I have wander'd.  
                                                     ' How many long years  
 ' Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorch-  
     ing tears,  
 ' While I wrote to you, splash'd out a girl's pre-  
     mature

'Moans of pain at what women in silence endure!  
 'To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes  
     alone,  
 'That now long-faded page of my life hath been  
     shown  
 'Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as  
     you know  
 'Many years since, — how many!  
                                     'A few months ago  
 'I seem'd reading it backward, that page! Why  
     explain  
 'Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose  
     again.  
 'The old superstition! the idol of old!  
 'It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould  
 'Is not to the forest more lost than to me  
 'That emotion. I bury it here by the sea  
 'Which will bear me anon far away from the  
     shore  
 'Of a land which my footsteps will visit no more,  
 'And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.  
 'Hark! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the  
     wave,  
 'Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home!  
 'I come, O you whispering voices, I come!  
 'My friend, ask me nothing.  
     'Receive me alone  
 'As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone  
 'In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring:  
 'It may be an angel that, weary of wing,  
 'Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,  
 'Or only a wayfarer stray'd in the gloom.  
 'This only I know: that in Europe at least  
 'Lives the craft or the power that must master our  
     East.  
 'Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves  
     yield at last?  
 'Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.  
 'The gods of the household Time thrusts from the  
     shelf;

‘ And I seem as unreal and weird to myself

‘ As those idols of old.

‘ Other times, other men,

‘ Other men, other passions !

‘ So be it ! yet again

‘ I turn to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,

‘ And the light of those lands where the great sun  
is born !

‘ Spread your arms, O my friend ! on your breast  
let me feel

‘ The repose which hath fled from my own.

‘ Your LUCILE.’





## PART II.

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### CANTO I.

#### I.

HARP of mine, to my breast let me clasp thee once  
more

As closely, old friend, as I clasp'd thee of yore,  
When the world smiled on me thro' thy three  
chords of gold,

Hope, Wonder, and Love, breathing music !  
Behold !

Now, celestially naked, — new Queen of the  
world, —

Where the rose, her red signal, is gaily unfurl'd,  
Summer stands in the meadows and dresses her  
bowers,

Shyly tended upon by the virgin-eyed flowers ;  
And her rich voice hath reach'd me, far-floating  
along —

' All my lovers sing round me, but where is thy  
song ? '

In secret the nightingale sings from the dark  
Of his thicket, in sunlight is singing the lark,  
And that spirit, which men call the cuckoo, sends  
out

Of the blue heart of heaven a jubilant shout,  
And the brown thrush is loud in the milk-white  
May-bush,

*And the bee makes a melody heard through the  
lush*

Yellow-neck'd honeysuckles, and out of its dream  
The air hums and whispers.

I turn to the theme

Long neglected.

Years, too, have pass'd over the head  
Of my hero since last of his fortunes you read,  
Gentle Reader. By way, then, of due preparation,

I feel that my song needs a new invocation.

Hard to find! For each Muse by this time has, I  
know,

Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow  
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal  
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray! — not Lindley, — but Murray and  
Son.

Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!  
In Albemarle Street may thy temple long stand!  
Long enlighten'd and led by thine erudite hand,  
May each novice in science nomadic unravel  
The *celarent, darii, ferio* of travel!

May each inn-keeping knave long thy judgments  
revere,

And the postboys of Europe regard thee with  
fear;

While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,  
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that  
portion

Of the national soil which the Greek exile took  
In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book  
Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy  
wit

Not to pay through his nose just for following it!  
May'st thou long, O instructor! preside o'er his  
way,

*And teach him alike what to praise and to pay!  
Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again  
I invoke, lest, unskill'd, I should wander in vain.*

To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse  
 Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse ;  
 For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems  
 Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.  
 Yes ! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John  
     Murray !  
 And I start — with thy book — for the Baths in a  
     hurry.

II.

' At Coblentz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine ;  
 ' And from thence the road, winding by Ehren-  
     breitstein,  
 ' Passes over the frontier of Nassau. (' N. B.  
 ' No Custom-house here since the Zollverein.' See  
 Murray, paragraph 30.)  
     ' The route, at each turn,  
 ' Here the lover of nature allows to discern,  
 ' In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale :  
 ' The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail  
 ' In the foliage observable here ; and, moreover,  
 ' The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover  
 ' Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that  
     hems  
 ' Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller to—  
     ' EMS.

A Schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.  
 At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you  
     pay

Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur  
 's attach'd to the place ; but most travellers prefer  
 Including, indeed, many persons of note)  
 'o dine at the usual-priced table d'hôte.

'hrough the town runs the Lahn, the steep green  
     banks of which

no rows of white picturesque houses enrich ;  
 and between the high-road and the river is laid  
 a sort of a garden, call'd " THE Promenade."

'Female visitors here, who may make up their  
     mind  
 'To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find  
 'On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day  
     long,  
 'Troops of donkeys — sure-footed — proverbially  
     strong ;'  
 And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he  
     passes,  
 Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

## III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these  
     springs  
 In the month when the merle on the maple-bough  
     sings,  
 Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths  
 By a similar sickness, there came to the baths  
 Four sufferers — each stricken deep through the  
     heart  
 Or the head by the selfsame invisible dart  
 Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,  
 From the sickness that walketh unseen in the  
     moon,  
 Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each  
 Infects with his own sores the next within reach.  
 First of these were a young English husband and  
     wife,  
 Grown weary ere half thro' the journey of life.  
 O Nature, say where, thou grey mother of earth,  
 Is the strength of thy youth ? that thy womb brings  
     to birth  
 Only old men to-day ! On the winds, as of old,  
 Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold ;  
 Thy forests are green as of yore ; and thine oceans  
 Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions :  
*But man — thy last birth and thy best — is no more*  
*Life's free lord, that look'd up to the starlight of*  
     yore,

With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the  
eyes,  
The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the  
skies ;  
But a grey-headed infant, defrauded of youth,  
Born too late or too early.

The lady, in truth,  
Was young, fair, and gentle ; and never was given  
To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.  
Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold  
Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand  
unroll'd

From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose  
An Aurora at dawn from her balmy repose,  
And into the mirror the bloom and the blush  
Of her beauty broke, glowing ; like light in a gush  
From the sunrise in summer.

Love, roaming, shall meet  
But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet —  
Eyes brighter — brows whiter — a figure more  
fair —

Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair —  
Than thine, Lady Alfred ! And here I aver  
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err !)  
That not all the oysters in Britain contain  
A pearl pure as thou art.

Let some one explain, —  
Who may know more than I of the intimate life  
Of the pearl with the oyster, — why yet in his  
wife,  
In despite of her beauty — and most when he  
felt

His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt —  
Lord Alfred miss'd something he sought for : in-  
deed,  
The more that he miss'd it, the greater the need ;  
Till it seem'd to himself he could willingly spare  
All the *charms* that he found for the one *charm*  
*not there.*

## IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands  
 The worth of their full usufruct at our hands  
 And the value of all things exists, not indeed  
 In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's  
                   need.

Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with Beauty and  
                   Youth,  
 Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet  
                   in truth

Unfulfill'd the ambition, and sterile the wealth  
 (In a life paralysed by a moral ill-health),  
 Had remain'd, while the beauty and youth, unre-  
                   deem'd

From a vague disappointment at all things, but  
                   seem'd

Day by day to reproach him in silence for all  
 That lost youth in himself they had fail'd to recall.  
 No career had he follow'd, no object obtain'd  
 In the world by those worldly advantages gain'd  
 From nuptials beyond which once seem'd to  
                   appear,

Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.  
 All that glitter'd and gleam'd through the moon-  
                   light of youth

With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth  
 Grasp'd and gather'd it, seem'd like that false fairy  
                   gold

Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and  
                   mould!

## V.

Fairy gold! moss and leaves! and the young Fairy  
                   Bride?

Lived there yet fairylands in the face at his  
                   side?

*Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watch'd  
 Some pale and impalpable vapour, detach'd*

From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall  
O'er the light of a sweet serene star, until all  
The chill'd splendour reluctantly waned in the  
deep

Of its own native heaven? So, slowly did creep  
O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,  
While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,  
Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil  
Of a sadness unconscious.

The lady grew pale  
As silent her lord grew : and both, as they ey'd  
Each the other askance, turn'd, and secretly  
sigh'd.

Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can  
give?

True, we know what life is—but, alas! do we  
live?

The grammar of life we have gotten by heart,  
But life's self we have made a dead language—an  
art,

Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 'twas  
spoken

When the silence of passion the first time was  
broken!

Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no  
doubt:

But the last man, at best, was but learn'd about  
What the first, without learning, *enjoy'd*. What  
art thou

To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?

A science. What wert thou to him that from  
ocean

First beheld thee appear? A surprise,—an  
emotion!

When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the  
heart,

When it thrills as it fills every animate part,

Where lurks it? how works it? . . we scarcely  
detect it.



But life goes : the heart dies : haste, O leech, and  
dissect it !

This accursèd æsthetical, ethical age  
Hath so finger'd life's horn-book, so blurr'd every  
page,

That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous  
story

With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,  
Is turn'd to a tedious instruction, not new  
To the children that read it insipidly through.

We know too much of Love ere we love. We can  
trace

Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face  
When we see it at last. 'Tis the same little Cupid,  
With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile  
almost stupid,

We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our  
shelves,

And copied a hundred times over, ourselves.  
And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,  
Still, that horrible sense of the *déjà connu* !

## VI.

Perchance 'twas the fault of the life that they led ;  
Perchance 'twas the fault of the novels they read ;  
Perchance 'twas a fault in themselves ; I am bound  
not

To say : this I know — that these two creatures  
found not

In each other some sign they expected to find  
Of a something unnamed in the heart or the mind ;  
And, missing it, each felt a right to complain  
Of a sadness which each found no word to explain.

Whatever it was, the world noticed not it  
In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.  
Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 'tis the  
case,

*Each must speak to the crowd with a mask on his  
face.*

Praise follow'd Matilda wherever she went.  
She was flatter'd. Can flattery purchase content?

Yes. While yet to its voice, for a moment, she listen'd,

The young cheek still bloom'd, and the soft eye still glisten'd;

And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid things

That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings  
Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved

Thro' that buzz of inferior creatures which proved  
Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot

'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that was not:

And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bow'd,  
(As they turn'd to each other, each flush'd from the crowd,)

And murmur'd those praises which yet seem'd more dear

Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,  
She, too, ceased for a while her own fate to regret:

'Yes! . . he loves me,' she sigh'd; 'this is love,  
then — and yet — !'

## VII.

Ah, that *yet*! fatal word! 'tis the moral of all  
Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since  
the Fall!

It stands at the end of each sentence we learn;

It flits in the vista of all we discern;

It leads us, for ever and ever, away

To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.

'Twas this same little fatal and mystical word

That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord

To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah;

*Drooping pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara!*

## VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the  
same,  
To these waters two other worn pilgrims there  
came :  
One a man, one a woman : just now, at the latter,  
As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her  
And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

## IX.

Of the self-crown'd young kings of the Fashion in  
France,  
Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,  
Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so  
bright,  
Who so hail'd in the salon, so mark'd in the Bois,  
Who so welcomed by all, as Eugène de Luvois ?  
Of all the smooth-brow'd premature debauchees  
In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees  
On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere  
graven, —  
In Paris I mean, — where the streets are all paven  
By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the  
way  
From Hell to this planet, — who, haughty and gay,  
The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,  
Walk'd that causeway as bold as Eugène de  
Luvois ?  
Yes ! he march'd through the great masquerade,  
loud of tongue,  
Bold of brow : but the motley he mask'd in, it  
hung  
So loose, trail'd so wide, and appear'd to impede  
So strangely at times the vex'd effort at speed,  
That a keen eye might guess it was made — not  
for him,  
*But some brawler more stalwart of stature and  
limb.*

That it irk'd him, in truth, you at times could  
     divine,  
 For when low was the music, and spilt was the  
     wine,  
 He would clutch at the garment, as though it op-  
     press'd  
 And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

## X.

What ! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease !  
 Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease ?  
 My friend, hear a parable : ponder it well :  
 For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.  
 One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,  
 And there, while I laugh'd at Grassot and Arnal,  
 My eye fell on the face of a man at my side ;  
 Every time that he laugh'd I observed that he  
     sigh'd,  
 As though vex'd to be pleased. I remark'd that  
     he sat  
 Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat  
 In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.  
 I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.  
 ' Sir,' he said, ' if what vexes me here you would  
     know,  
 ' Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours  
     ago,  
 ' I walk'd into the Français, to look at Rachel.  
 ' (Sir, that woman in Phèdre is a miracle !)—Well,  
 ' I ask'd for a box : they were occupied all :  
 ' For a seat in the balcon : all taken ! a stall :  
 ' Taken too : the whole house was as full as could  
     be, —  
 ' Not a hole for a rat ! I had just time to see  
 ' The lady I love *tête-à-tête* with a friend  
 ' In a box out of reach at the opposite end :  
 ' Then the crowd push'd me out. What was left  
     me to do ?  
 ' I tried for the tragedy . . . *que voulez vous ?*

' Every place for the tragedy book'd ! . . . *mon ami*,  
 ' The farce was close by : . . . at the farce *me voici* !  
 ' The piece is a new one : and Grassot plays well :  
 ' There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel :  
 ' Arnal's nose is surprising indeed ! . . . yet I meant  
 ' My evening elsewhere, and not thus, to have  
     spent.  
 ' Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours !  
 ' Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers.'

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment ;  
 And I mark'd, when his features I fix'd in my com-  
     ment,  
 O'er those features the same vague disquietude  
     stray  
 I had seen on the face of my friend at the play ;  
 And I thought that he too, very probably, spent  
 His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

## XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,  
 O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit !  
 Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert  
     sand,  
 Grown impatient too soon for the long promised  
     land,  
 He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,  
 An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,  
 And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf  
 And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself  
 A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,  
 And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the  
     knee.  
 The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods :  
 Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods  
 We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they  
     bleed,  
*But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our*  
     *need.*

The land is athirst, and cries out ! . . . 'tis in vain ;  
The great blessing of heaven descends not in rain.

## XII.

It was night ; and the lamps were beginning to  
gleam

Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his  
dream,

From that building which looks like a temple . . .  
and is

The Temple of — Health ? Nay, but enter ! I wis  
That never the rosy-hued deity knew

One votary out of that sallow-cheek'd crew

Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,  
Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians ;

Jews — Hamburgers chiefly ; — pure patriots, —  
Suabians ; —

' Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,

' And the dwellers in Pontus' . . . My muse will  
not weary

More lines with the list of them . . . *cur fremuere ?*

What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum ?

Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come ?

Oh what is the name of the God at whose fane

Every nation is mix'd in so motley a train ?

What weird Cabala lies on those tables outspread ?

To what oracle turns with attention each head ?

What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,

And what are those hierophants busied about ?

## XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro,

And rolls without ceasing, the great Yes and No :

Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,

And the God worshipp'd here is the old God of  
Chance.

Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon

*Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune ;*  
*And an indistinct music for ever is roll'd,*

That mixes and chimes with the chink of the  
 gold,  
 From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,  
 Of figures for ever eluding the gaze;  
 For there the Ball bounds like a wanton gazelle  
 Pursued by a bee through a warm golden dell;  
 It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the  
 glass,  
 And the weird words pursue it — *Pair, Impair, et*  
*Passe!*  
 Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams  
 as encumber  
 With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber  
 Of some witch when she seeks, through a night-  
 mare, to grab at  
 The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

## XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met  
 Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet  
 Was but young) in this selfsame Pavilion of  
 Chance.

The idler from England, the idler from France  
 Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial  
 pleasure:

An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treas-  
 ure,

And they both were too well-bred in aught to be-  
 tray

One discourteous remembrance of things pass'd  
 away.

'Twas a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,  
 These two friends exchange greetings; — the men  
 who had been

Foes so nearly in days that were past.

This, no doubt,

*Is why, on the night I am speaking about,*  
*My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,*  
*Without one suspicion his bosom to fret,*

Although he had left, with his pleasant French  
friend,  
Matilda, half vex'd, at the room's farthest end.

## XV.

'Tis a fact, by all history placed beyond doubt,  
That there needs nothing more a whole army to  
rout

Than one coward that takes to his heels; for, with  
speed,

His fellows are certain to follow the lead.

Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began

With a few modest thalers — away they all ran —  
The reserve follow'd fast in the rear. As his  
purse

Grew lighter, his spirits grew sensibly worse.

One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:

'Tis an old law in physics — *Natura abhorret*  
*Vacuum* — and my lord, as he watch'd his last  
crown

Tumble into the bank, turn'd away with a frown

Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have  
deck'd

On that day of all days when an empire was  
wreck'd

On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witness'd the last  
Of his favourite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!

Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,

Within him the sudden strange sense that some eye  
Had long been intently regarding him there, —

That some gaze was upon him too searching to  
bear.

He rose and look'd up. Was it fact? Was it  
fable?

Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the  
green table,

That face, with its features so fatally known —

Those eyes, whose deep gaze answer'd strangely  
*his own* —



What was it? Some ghost from its grave come  
 again?  
 Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?  
 Or was it herself—with those deep eyes of hers,  
 And that face unforgotten?—Lucile de Nevers!

## XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,  
 Who appear'd to herself but the dream of a dream!  
 'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so  
 hush'd,

That pale cheek for ever by passion unflush'd,  
 There yawn'd an insatiate void, and there heaved  
 A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.

The brief noon of beauty was passing away,  
 And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and grey,  
 O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.

And now, as all round her the dim evening stole,  
 With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved  
 For the want of that tender assurance received  
 From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an  
 eye,

Which should say, or should look, 'Fear thou  
 nought,—I am by!'

And thus, through that lonely and self-fix'd exist-  
 ence,

Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and  
 distance:

A strange sort of faint-footed fear,—like a mouse  
 That comes out, when 'tis dark, in some old ducal  
 house,

Long deserted, where no one the creature can  
 scare,

And the forms on the arras are all that move there.

In Rome,—in the Forum,—there open'd one night  
*A gulf.* All the augurs turn'd pale at the sight.

*In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.*  
*Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said:—*

‘ Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last  
‘ That which Rome hath most precious within it be  
cast.’

The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,  
But the gulf yawn’d as wide. Rome seem’d likely  
enough

To be ruin’d, ere this rent in her heart she could  
choke.

Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke :

‘ O Quirites ! to this Heaven’s question is come :

‘ What to Rome is most precious ? The manhood  
of Rome.’

He plunged, and the gulf closed.

The tale is not new ;

But the moral applies many ways, and is true.

How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be  
destroy’d ?

‘Tis a warm human life that must fill up the void.

Thorough many a heart runs the rent in the fable ;

But who to discover a Curtius is able ?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding place, at the  
source

Of the sunrise ; where, fair in their fabulous course,

Run the rivers of Eden : an exile again,

To the cities of Europe — the scenes, and the men,

And the life, and the ways, she had left : still  
oppress’d

With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable  
breast.

The same, to the same things ! The world she had  
quitted

With a sigh, with a sigh she reënter’d. Soon  
flitted

Through the salons and clubs, to the great satis-  
faction

Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.

The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once  
more

To her old friend, the World, had reopen'd her  
door;  
The World came, and shook hands, and was  
pleased and amused  
With what the World then went away and abused.  
From the woman's fair fame it in nought could  
detract,  
'Twas the woman's free genius it vex'd and attack'd  
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.  
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not  
reach  
The lone heart they aim'd at. Her tears fell be-  
yond  
The world's limit, to feel that the world could  
respond  
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in  
nought.  
'Twas no longer this earth's idler inmates she  
sought :  
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage  
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.  
Some had genius; and all, wealth of mind to confer  
On the world: but that wealth was not lavish'd for  
her.  
For the genius of man, though so human indeed,  
When call'd out to man's help by some great hu-  
man need,  
The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses  
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.  
Genius touches the world at but one point alone  
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known  
To the world: all the infinite number of lines  
That radiate thither a mere point combines,  
But one only, — some central affection apart  
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is  
Heart,  
*And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and  
mind.*  
*And therefore it was that Lucile sigh'd to find*

Men of genius appear, one and all, in her ken,  
When they stoop'd themselves to it, as mere clever  
men ;  
Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are  
unfurl'd  
Worlds new-fashion'd for man, as mere men of the  
world.  
And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight  
Of the sunset of youth, with her face toward the  
light,  
And watch'd her own shadow grow long at her feet,  
As though stretch'd out, the shade of some *other* to  
meet,  
The woman felt homeless and childless : in scorn  
She seem'd mock'd by the voices of children un-  
born ;  
And when from these sombre reflections away  
She turn'd, with a sigh, to that gay world, more  
gay  
For her presence within it, she knew herself friend-  
less ;  
That her path led from peace, and that path ap-  
pear'd endless !  
That even her beauty had been but a snare,  
And her wit sharpen'd only the edge of despair.

## XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flush'd by surprise,  
Alfred turn'd to Lucile. With those deep search-  
ing eyes  
She look'd into his own. Not a word that she said,  
Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betray'd.  
She seem'd to smile through him, at something  
beyond :  
When she answer'd his questions, she seem'd to  
respond  
To some voice in herself. With no trouble de-  
scribed  
To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied.

Not so he. At the sight of that face back again  
 To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,  
 A remember'd resentment, half-check'd by a wild  
 And relentful regret like a motherless child  
 Softly seeking admittance with plaintive appeal  
 To the heart which resisted its entrance.

Lucile  
 And himself thus, however, with freedom allow'd  
 To old friends, talking still side by side, left the  
 crowd,  
 By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, how-  
 ever,  
 By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never  
 Seen her husband's new friend.

She had follow'd by chance,  
 Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance  
 Which the Duke, when he witness'd their meeting,  
 had turn'd  
 On Lucile and Lord Alfred ; and, scared, she dis-  
 cern'd  
 On his features the shade of a gloom so profound  
 That she shudder'd instinctively. Deaf to the  
 sound  
 Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers  
 He replied not, but murmur'd, ' Lucile de Nevers  
 ' Once again then ? so be it ! ' In the mind of that  
 man,  
 At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the  
 plan  
 Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone  
 (To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)  
 As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of  
 thought  
 By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

## XIX.

' So ! ' he thought, ' they meet thus : and reweave  
 the old charm !  
 ' And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his  
 arm,

' And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not of me !

' Oh, what if I show'd her that I, too, can be

' Loved by one — her own rival — more fair and more young ?'

The serpent rose in him : a serpent which, stung, Sought to sting.

Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye Fix'd upon them, Lucile and my lord saunter'd by, In converse which seem'd to be earnest. A smile Now and then seem'd to show where their thoughts touch'd. Meanwhile

The Muse of this story, convinced that they need her,

To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

# xx.

The Duke, with that sort of aggressive false praise Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise From the listener (as sometimes a judge, just before He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly With the man he is minded to hang by and by), Had referr'd to Lucile, and then stopp'd to detect In the face of Matilda the growing effect Of the words he had dropp'd. There's no weapon that slays

Its victim so surely (if well aim'd) as praise.

Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen : and now

Each was silent, preoccupied, thoughtful.

You know

There are moments when silence, prolong'd and unbroken,

More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.

It is when the heart has an instinct of what

In the heart of another is passing. And that

In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence came

To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame ?  
 What weigh'd down her head !

All your eye could discover  
 Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover  
 That trouble the Duke's presence seem'd to renew.  
 She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.  
 The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell  
 Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.  
 She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush rose  
 blossom

Which had fall'n from the nosegay she wore in her  
 bosom :

' This poor flower,' she said, ' seems it not out of  
 place

In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile grace ? '  
 She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile  
 The Duke watch'd her caressing the leaves all the  
 while,

And continued on his side the silence. He knew  
 This would force his companion their talk to renew  
 At the point that he wish'd ; and Matilda divined.  
 The significant pause with new trouble of mind.  
 She lifted one moment her head ; but her look  
 Encounter'd the ardent regard of the Duke,  
 And dropp'd back on her flow'ret abash'd. Then  
 still seeking

The assurance she fancied she show'd him by  
 speaking,

She conceived herself safe in adopting again  
 The theme she should most have avoided just then.

#### XXI.

' Duke,' she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke, her  
 cheek burn'd,

' You know, then, this . . . lady ? '

' Too well ! ' he return'd.

LADY ALFRED.

*True ; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.*

THE DUKE.

With emotion ?

LADY ALFRED.

Yes, yes ! you described her, I know,  
As possess'd of a charm all unrivall'd.

THE DUKE.

Alas !

You mistook me completely ! You, madam, surpass  
This Countess as moonlight does lamplight ; as  
youth  
Surpasses its best imitations ; as truth  
The fairest of falsehoods surpasses ; as nature  
Surpasses art's masterpiece ; ay, as the creature  
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses  
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-  
glasses !

' Yet you said,' — she continued with some trepidation,  
' That you quite comprehended ' . . . a slight hesitation  
Shook the sentence, . . . ' a passion so strong as ' . . .

THE DUKE.

True, true !

But not in a man that had once look'd at you.  
Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or . . .

' Hush, hush ! '

She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.  
' Between man and woman these things differ so !  
' It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should  
I know ?)  
' In you what it visits on us ; or 'tis true,  
' It may be, that we women are better than you.'



## THE DUKE.

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.

The world, in its judgment, some difference may make

'Twixt the man and the woman, so far as respects  
Its social enactments; but not as affects

The one sentiment which, it were easy to prove,  
Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

## LADY ALFRED.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe.  
Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear  
I have learn'd that the heart cannot always repress  
Or account for the feelings which sway it.

'Yes! yes!

'That is too true indeed!' . . . the Duke sigh'd.

And again

For one moment in silence continued the twain.

## XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had  
needed

All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded:

'And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the gift

'Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift

'Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,

'One pang of wrong'd love, to which women less  
fair

'Are exposed, when they love?'

With a quick change of tone,

As tho' by resentment impell'd, he went on:—

'The name that you bear, it is whisper'd, you took

'From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that  
look

'So excited, so keen, on the face you must know

‘ Throughout all its expressions, — that rapturous glow —

‘ Those eloquent features — significant eyes —

'Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no surprise,'

(He pointed his hand, as he spoke, to the door,  
Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred) . . ' before.

‘Have you ever once seen what just now you may view

'In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 'tis new.

‘Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,

**'Are you loved?'** . . .

## XXIII.

He look'd at her — paused — felt if thus far  
The ground held yet. The ardour with which he  
had spoken.

This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,  
Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,  
As though some indefinite danger were near.

With composure, however, at once she replied : —

‘Tis three years since the day when I first was a  
bride.

‘ And my husband I never had cause to suspect ;

'Nor ever have stoop'd, sir, such cause to detect.

'Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see —

' See, or fancy — some moment's oblivion of me,

'I trust that I too should forget it, — for you

'Must have seen that my heart is my husband's.'

On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke

She had utter'd this vague and half-frighten'd  
rebuke,

Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word  
Seem'd to die on her lip, and could scarcely be  
heard.

**There was silence again.**

A great step had been made

By the Duke in the words he that evening had said.  
 There, half-drown'd by the music, Matilda, that  
     night,  
 Had listen'd, — long listen'd — no doubt, in despite  
 Of herself, to a voice she should never have heard,  
 And her heart by that voice had been troubled and  
     stirr'd.

And so, having suffer'd in silence his eye  
 To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh :

## XXIV.

' Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade  
 ' By disclosing my own ? The position,' he said,  
 ' In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse  
 ' The frankness and force of the words which I use.  
 ' You say that your heart is your husband's: you  
     say  
 ' That you love him. You think so, of course,  
     lady . . . nay,  
 ' Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.  
 ' But, trust me, no true love there can be without  
 ' Its dread penalty — jealousy.  
     ' Well, do not start'  
 ' Until now, — either thanks to a singular art  
 ' Of supreme self-control, you have held them all  
     down  
 ' Unreveal'd in your heart, — or you never have  
     known  
 ' Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs  
 ' Which deep passion engenders ; that anguish  
     which hangs  
 ' On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.  
 ' If, lady, the love you describe, in the bed  
 ' As tho' by a full security thus hath reposed  
 ' The name that with mild eyelids on happiness closed,  
 ' From love, no expose to a peril unjust,  
     look  
 ' So excited, so kee*ve*, and, indeed, it may be,  
     *low* not, continue to see

woman whose place rivals yours in the life  
 and the heart which not only your title of wife,  
 but also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,  
 could have made wholly yours?—You, who  
 gave all your own!

flect!—'tis the peace of existence you stake  
 the turn of a die. And for whose—for his  
 sake?—

while you witness this woman, the false point of  
 view

from which she must now be regarded by you  
 all exaggerate to you, whatever they be,  
 the charms I admit she possesses. To me  
 they are trivial indeed; yet to your eyes, I fear  
 I foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.  
 If unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess  
 how more lovely by far is the grace you possess,  
 you will wrong your own beauty. The graces of  
 art,

you will take for the natural charm of the heart;  
 studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,  
 will too soon in that fatal comparison be  
 your fancy more fair than that sweet timid  
 sense

which, in shrinking, betrays its own best elo-  
 quence.

Then, lady, then you will feel in your heart  
 the poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!  
 While you see her, yourself you no longer will  
 see,—

you will hear her, and hear not yourself,—you  
 will be

unhappy; unhappy because you will deem  
 your own power less great than her power will  
 seem.

And I shall not be by your side, day by day,  
 despite of your noble displeasure, to say  
 "You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair  
 than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can  
 wear!"

## XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased

The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.

Still she spoke with what calmness she could —

‘ Sir, the while

‘ I thank you,’ she said, with a faint scornful smile,

‘ For your fervour in painting my fancied distress :

‘ Allow me the right some surprise to express

‘ At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me

‘ The possible depth of my own misery.’

‘ That zeal would not startle you, madam,’ he said,

‘ Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,

‘ The peculiar interest which causes that zeal — ’

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.

‘ Duke,’ she answer’d in accents short, cold, and severe,

As she rose from her seat, ‘ I continue to hear ;

‘ But permit me to say, I no more understand.’

‘ Forgive !’ with a nervous appeal of the hand,

And a well-feign’d confusion of voice and of look,

‘ Forgive, oh, forgive me !’ at once cried the Duke.

‘ I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave

‘ I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)

‘ For one moment to speak of myself, — for I think

‘ That you wrong me — ’

His voice, as in pain, seem’d to sink ;

And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glisten’d.

## XXVI.

*Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listen’d.*

## XXVII.

‘Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,  
‘Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in  
me,’

He continued, ‘a sorrow which draws me to side  
‘With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not,’ he  
cried,

‘At so strange an avowal.

‘I seek at a ball,

‘For instance, — the beauty admired by all ?

‘No ! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits

‘Scorn’d of course by the beauties, and shunn’d by  
the wits.

‘All the world is accustom’d to wound, or neglect,

‘Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my  
respect.

‘No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,

‘I admit, to those charter’d redressers of wrong ;

‘But I seek to console, where I can. ’Tis a part

‘Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart.’

These trite words, from the tone which he gave  
them, received

An appearance of truth, which might well be  
believed

By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda’s.

And so

He continued . . . ‘O lady ! alas, could you know

‘What injustice and wrong in this world I have  
seen !

‘How many a woman, believed to have been

‘Without a regret, I have known turn aside

‘To burst into heartbroken tears undescried !

‘On how many a lip have I witness’d the smile

‘Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart  
the while !’

Said Matilda, ‘Your life, it would seem, then, must  
be

‘One long act of devotion.’

'Perhaps so,' said he;  
 'But at least that devotion small merit can boast,  
 'For one day may yet come, — if *one* day at the  
     most, —  
 'When, perceiving at last all the difference — how  
     great! —  
 'Twixt the heart that neglects, and the heart that  
     can wait,  
 'Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,  
 'Some woman, that else might have pass'd in dis-  
     dain  
 'Or indifference by me, — in passing *that* day  
 'Might pause, with a word or a smile, to repay  
 'This devotion, — and then' . . .

## XXVIII.

                                    To Matilda's relief  
 At that moment her husband approach'd.  
                                     With some grief  
 I must own that her welcome, perchance, was ex-  
     press'd  
 The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast  
 Of a conscience disturb'd, and her smile not less  
     warm,  
 Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his  
     arm.  
 The Duke turn'd, and adjusted his collar.  
                                     Thought he,  
 'Good! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee  
 'That the family doctor's the part I must play.  
 'Very well! but the patients my visits shall pay.'  
 Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife;  
 And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife  
 Of emotions which made her voice shake, mur-  
     mur'd low  
 Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a  
     bow  
*Which betoken'd a distant defiance, replied*  
*To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried*

Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace  
Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her  
place

She assumed by Matilda, unconscious perchance,  
Or resolved not to notice, the half-frighten'd glance  
That follow'd that movement.

The Duke to his feet  
Arose ; and, in silence, relinquish'd his seat.  
One must own that the moment was awkward for  
all ;

But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall  
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,  
And from each the reserve seem'd reluctant to  
melt ;

Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four  
Thro' the crowd saunter'd, smiling.

## XXIX.

Approaching the door,  
Eugène de Luvois, who had fallen behind,  
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was join'd.  
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal  
Which appear'd to imply, without words, ' Let us  
feel

' That the friendship between us in years that are  
fled,

' Has survived one mad moment forgotten,' she  
said,

' You remain, Duke, at Ems ? '

He turn'd on her a look  
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke ;  
And then, with a more than significant glance  
At Matilda, maliciously answer'd, ' Perchance.  
' I have here an attraction. And you ? ' he re-  
turn'd.

Lucile's eyes had follow'd his own, and discern'd  
The boast they implied.

He repeated, ' And you ? '  
And, still watching Matilda, she answer'd, ' I too ? '



And he thought, as with that word she left him,  
she sigh'd.

The next moment her place she resumed by the  
side

Of Matilda ; and soon they shook hands at the gate  
Of the selfsame hotel.

## XXX.

One depress'd, one elate, .  
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, thro' the glooms  
Of the thick linden alley, return'd to the Rooms.  
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,  
At the inn, as they turn'd, arm-in-arm, from the  
door.

Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, *experto*  
(*Me miserum quoties !*) *crede Roberto*.

In silence, awhile, they walk'd onward.

At last

The Duke's thoughts to language half-consciously  
pass'd.

THE DUKE.

Once more ! yet once more !

LORD ALFRED.

What ?

THE DUKE.

We meet her, once more,  
The woman for whom we two madmen of yore  
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh !) were about to  
destroy  
Each the other !

LORD ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I  
*Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say !*  
*can you*  
*Recall it with coolness and quietude now ?*

THE DUKE.

Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true *Parisien*:  
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then  
The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

LORD ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I  
now may  
Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until  
Such a moment, I waited . . . .

THE DUKE.

Oh! ask what you will.  
*Franc jeu!* on the table my cards I spread out.  
Ask!

LORD ALFRED.

Duke, you were call'd to a meeting (no doubt  
You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night  
When you went; and before you return'd it was  
light.

We met: you accosted me then with a brow  
Bright with triumph: your words (you remember  
them now?)  
Were, 'Let us be friends!'

THE DUKE.

Well?

LORD ALFRED.

How then, after that,  
Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

THE DUKE.

What!  
Did she not then; herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,  
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of  
hers?

LORD ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.  
But the question I ask should be answer'd at last :  
By you, if you will ; if you will not, by her.

THE DUKE.

Indeed ? but that question, milord, can it stir  
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er ?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, altho' love be no more.  
Lucile ask'd me, this night, to my wife (under-  
stand

To *my wife* !) to present her. I did so. Her hand  
Has clasp'd that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe  
Respect to the name that is ours : and, if so,  
To the woman that bears it a two-fold respect.  
Answer, Duc de Luvois ! Did Lucile then reject  
The proffer you made of your hand and your  
name ?

Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim  
Urged before ? I ask bluntly this question, be-  
cause

My title to do so is clear by the laws  
That all gentlemen honour. Make only one sign  
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,  
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,  
From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance,  
and I

And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

The Duke  
Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look  
Of the man at his side, that he meant what he  
*said,*  
*And there flash'd in a moment these thoughts thro'*  
*his head :*

‘Leave Ems! would that suit me? no! that were  
again  
‘To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,  
‘She herself will . . . *et puis, il a raison; on est*  
‘*Gentilhomme après tout!*’ He replied therefore,  
‘Nay!  
‘Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,  
‘In those days, I was mad; and in some mad reply  
‘I threaten’d the life of the rival to whom  
‘That rejection was due, I was led to presume.  
‘She fear’d for his life; and the letter which then  
‘She wrote me, I show’d you; we met: and again  
‘My hand was refused, and my love was denied.  
‘And the glance you mistook was the vizard which  
Pride  
‘Lends to Humiliation.’

‘And so,’ half in jest  
He went on, ‘in this best world, ’tis all for the  
best!  
‘You are wedded (bless’d Englishman!), wedded  
to one  
‘Whose past can be call’d into question by none:  
‘And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still laugh to feel  
‘I am lord of myself, and the Mode: and Lucile  
‘Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair  
‘As yon German moon o’er the linden-tops there!  
‘A Dian in marble that scorns any troth  
‘With the little love-gods, whom I thank for us  
both,  
‘While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,  
‘That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.  
‘Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!’

## XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,  
Turn’d and enter’d the Rooms which, thus talking,  
meanwhile,  
They had reach’d.

## XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown  
Heart and mind!) in the darkness bewilder'd, alone:  
'And so,' to himself did he mutter, 'and so  
' 'Twas to rescue my life, gentle spirit! and, oh,  
' For this did I doubt her? . . . a light word — a  
look —  
' The mistake of a moment! . . . for this I for-  
sook —  
' For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile! O Lucile!  
Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,  
Weary changes on one dirge-like note thro' his  
brain,  
As he stray'd down the darkness.

## XXXIV.

Re-entering again  
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turn'd to  
roulette,  
And sat down, and play'd fast, and lost largely,  
and yet  
He still smiled: night deepen'd: he play'd his last  
number:  
Went home: and soon slept: and still smiled in his  
slumber.

## XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,  
'In the grief or mischance of a friend, you may  
note,  
' There is something which always gives pleasure.'  
Alas!  
That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.  
La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down —  
'No misfortune, but what *some* one turns to his  
own  
' *Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it*  
' *There ever is somebody ready to profit:*

‘ No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all  
‘ Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall  
‘ Of another man’s heart, and make traffic in it.’  
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld !

Fool ! one man’s wit  
All men’s selfishness how should it fathom ?

O sage,  
Dost thou satirize Nature ?

She laughs at thy page.

## CANTO II.

## I.

COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

‘London, 18—.

‘My dear Alfred,

‘Your last letters put me in pain.

‘This contempt of existence, this listless disdain

‘Of your own life, — its joys and its duties, — the  
deuce

‘Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse !

‘I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your  
leg,‘And compel you to stump through the world on a  
peg.

‘I wish that you had, like myself (more’s the pity !),

‘To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.

‘I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread

‘Of another — (what is it that Dante has said ?)

‘And the trouble of other men’s stairs. In a word,

‘I wish fate had some real affliction conferr’d

‘On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had  
cause

‘For neglecting life’s duties, and damning its laws !

‘This pressure against all the purpose of life,

‘This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,

‘Betoken’d, I grant that it may be in truth,

‘The richness and strength of the new wine of  
youth.‘But if, when the wine should have mellow’d with  
time,‘*Being bottled and binn’d, to a flavour sublime,*‘*It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,*‘*Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste*

- ‘ The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,  
‘ Self-love’s little lapdog, the over-fed darling  
‘ Of a hypochondriacal fancy, appears,  
‘ To my thinking at least, in a man of your years,  
‘ At the midnoon of manhood, with plenty to do,  
‘ And every incentive for doing it too, —  
‘ With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing  
‘ For prayer, and of joys more than most men for  
    blessing;  
‘ With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full  
    purse, —  
‘ Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse !  
‘ I wish I could get you at least to agree  
‘ To take life as it is, and consider with me,  
‘ If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers ;  
‘ It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.  
‘ Do you think none have known but yourself all  
    the pain  
‘ Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain ?  
‘ And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,  
‘ Twixt the life that’s within, and the life that’s  
    without ?  
‘ What one of us finds the world just as he likes ?  
‘ Or gets what he wants when he wants it ? Or  
    strikes  
‘ Without missing the thing that he strikes at the  
    first ?  
‘ Or walks without stumbling ? Or quenches his  
    thirst  
‘ At one draught ? Bah ! I tell you ! I, bachelor  
    John,  
‘ Have had griefs of my own. But what then ? I  
    push on  
‘ All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain  
‘ Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.  
‘ God means every man to be happy, be sure.  
‘ He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.  
‘ Our duty down here is to do, not to know.  
‘ Live as though life were earnest, and life will be



- ‘ Let each moment, like Time’s last ambassador,  
come :  
‘ It will wait to deliver its message ; and some  
‘ Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed  
‘ A man does, but the way that he does it, should  
plead  
‘ For the man’s compensation in doing it.  
‘ Here,  
‘ My next neighbour’s a man with twelve thousand  
a year,  
‘ Who deems that life has not a pastime more  
pleasant  
‘ Than to follow a fox, or to slaughter a pheasant.  
‘ Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,  
‘ Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,  
‘ All the day through upon a committee, and late  
‘ To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,  
‘ As though he were getting each speaker by heart,  
‘ Though amongst them he never presumes to take  
part.  
‘ One asks oneself why, without murmur or question,  
‘ He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,  
‘ For a labour of which the result seems so small.  
‘ “ The man is ambitious,” you say. Not at all.  
‘ He has just sense enough to be fully aware  
‘ That he never can hope to be Premier, or share  
‘ The renown of a Tully ; — or even to hold  
‘ A subordinate office. He is not so bold  
‘ As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear  
‘ With patience his modest opinions to hear.  
‘ “ But he wants something ! ”  
‘ What ! with twelve thousand a year ?  
‘ *What could Government give him would be half  
so dear*  
‘ *To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun*

‘ Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital  
run ?

‘ “ No ; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain ;

‘ The man would be more than his neighbours, ’tis  
plain ;

‘ And the drudgery drearily gone through in town

‘ Is more than repaid by provincial renown.

‘ Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,

‘ Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance ;  
the goose,

‘ If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,

‘ As proud as a sultan, returns to his boors.”

‘ Wrong again ! if you think so,

‘ For, *primo* : my friend

‘ Is the head of a family known from one end

‘ Of his shire to the other, as the oldest ; and there-  
fore

‘ He despises fine lords and fine ladies. *He* care  
for

‘ A peerage ? no truly ! *Secondo* ; he rarely

‘ Or never goes out : dines at Bellamy’s sparsely,

‘ And abhors what you call the gay world.

‘ Then, I ask,

‘ What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed  
task

‘ As the life of this man, — but the sense of its  
duty ?

‘ And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest  
beauty

‘ Have never inspired in my soul that intense, . .

‘ Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense . .

‘ Of heart-felt admiration I feel for this man,

‘ As I see him beside me ; — there, wearing the  
wan

‘ London daylight away, on his humdrum com-  
mittee ;

‘ So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,

‘ And wonder — and worship, I might say.

‘ To me

' There seems something nobler than genius to be  
 ' In that dull patient labour no genius relieves,  
 ' That absence of all joy which yet never grieves ;  
 ' The humility of it ! the grandeur withal !  
 ' The sublimity of it ! And yet, should you call  
 ' The man's own very slow apprehension to this,  
 ' He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is !  
 ' His work is the duty to which he was born ;  
 ' He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn :  
 ' And this man is no uncommon type (I thank  
     Heaven !)  
 ' Of this land's common men. In all other lands,  
     even  
 ' The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 'tis the  
     reason  
 ' That government oscillates ever 'twixt treason  
 ' And tyranny elsewhere.

' I wander away

' Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.  
 ' You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the  
     soul  
 ' Is immortal ; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,  
 ' Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart  
 ' Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art : —  
 ' The Greek Psyche, — that's beauty, — the perfect  
     ideal :  
 ' But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,  
 ' With its pain'd aspiration and strife. In those  
     pale  
 ' Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.  
 ' You have studied all this. Then, the universe,  
     too,  
 ' Is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.  
 ' Geology opens the mind. So you know  
 ' Something also of strata and fossils ; these show  
 ' The bases of cosmical structure : some mention  
 ' Of the nebulous theory demands your attention ;  
 ' And so on.

' In short, it is clear the interior

' Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior  
 ' In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,  
 ' To that of my poor parliamentary squire ;  
 ' But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this  
     heat  
 ' Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incom-  
     plete.  
 ' You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly  
     at ?  
 ' My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.  
 ' An old illustration's as good as a new,  
 ' Provided the old illustration be true.  
 ' We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we  
     fly,  
 ' Though we marvel to see them ascending so high ;  
 ' Things slight in themselves, — long-tail'd toys,  
     and no more !  
 ' What is it that makes the kite steadily soar  
 ' Through the realms where the cloud and the  
     whirlwind have birth,  
 ' But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth ?  
 ' I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,  
 ' And the hornbook I learn'd on my poor mother's  
     knee.  
 ' In truth, I suspect little else do we learn  
 ' From this great book of life, which so shrewdly  
     we turn,  
 ' Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,  
 ' What we learn'd in the hornbook of childhood.  
                                     ' Your case  
 ' Is exactly in point.  
                             ' Fly your kite, if you please,  
 ' Out of sight : let it go where it will, on the  
     breeze ;  
 ' But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,  
 ' Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.  
 ' No man is the absolute lord of his life.  
 ' You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and  
     dear wife.

- ‘ If I often have sigh’d by my own silent fire,  
‘ With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire  
‘ For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,  
‘ Some dull winter evening to solace and share  
‘ With the love which the world its good children allows  
‘ To shake hands with, — in short, a legitimate spouse,  
‘ This thought has consoled me: “at least I have given  
‘ For my own good behaviour no hostage to heaven.”  
‘ You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,  
‘ I would rather break stones on a road than be you.  
‘ If any man wilfully injured, or led  
‘ That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,  
‘ Even though you yourself were the sinner!  
‘ And this  
‘ Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)  
‘ To the matter I meant to have mention’d at once,  
‘ But these thoughts put it out of my head for the nonce.  
‘ Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,  
‘ Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,  
‘ The wolf best received by the flock he devours  
‘ Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.  
‘ At least, this has long been my settled conviction,  
‘ And I almost would venture at once the prediction  
‘ That before very long — but no matter! I trust  
‘ For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.  
‘ But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on  
‘ The score of such men as, with both God and Mammon,

**' Seem so shrewdly familiar.**

**'Neglect not this warning.**

' There were rumours afloat in the City this morning

‘ Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows?  
would he fleece

‘At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?’

**'For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune**

'Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune

**' Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,**

‘ Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up winner.

'I say, lose no time!' out of the grab

Of her trustee and r  
Ridley MacNab.

'I trust those deposits, as fast, are drawn out,

'And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.

**'A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.'**

\* *Verbum sap.* I admit nothing yet justifies

**'My mistrust; but I have in my own mind a notion**

'That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of devotion,

**'Have long been the only ostensible capital**

' On which he does business. If so, time must sap it all.

**' Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,**

**'Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.'**

'I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect;

**'I give you my notions. Form yours, and reflect.**

‘ My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.

'I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell

**'Worth your hearing. We think that the govern-  
ment here**

‘ Will not last out next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,

' You will see by the Times. There are symptoms which show

*'That the ministers now are preparing to go,  
'And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes.*

‘ It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,  
‘ And cramming their pockets with bon-bons. Your  
news  
‘ Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,  
‘ Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so,  
‘ You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman ?  
I know  
‘ That the man is a sad *mauvais sujet*. Take  
care  
‘ Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there ;  
‘ But, before I am free, you are sure to be gone.  
‘ Good-bye, my dear fellow.

‘Yours, anxiously,  
‘JOHN.’

## II.

This is just the advice I myself would have given  
To Lord Alfred, had I been his cousin, which,  
    heaven  
Be praised, I am not. But it reach'd him indeed  
In an unlucky hour, and received little heed.  
A half-languid glance was the most that he lent at  
That time to these homilies. *Primum dementat*  
*Quem Deus vult perdere.* Alfred in fact  
Was behaving just then in a way to distract  
Job's self had Job known him. The more you'd  
    have thought  
The Duke's court to Matilda his eye would have  
    caught,  
The more did his aspect grow listless to hers,  
And the more did it beam to Lucile de Nevers.  
And Matilda, the less she found love in the look  
Of her husband, the less did she shrink from the  
    Duke.  
With each day that pass'd o'er them, they each,  
    heart from heart,  
Woke to feel themselves further and further apart.  
More and more of his time Alfred pass'd at the  
    table.

Play'd high : and lost more than to lose he was  
able.

He grew feverish, querulous, absent, perverse, —  
And here I must mention, what made matters  
worse,

That Lucile and the Duke at the selfsame hotel  
With the Vargraves resided. It needs not to tell  
That they all saw too much of each other. The  
weather

Was so fine that it brought them each day all  
together

In the garden, — to listen, of course, to the band.

The house was a sort of phalanstery ; and

Lucile and Matilda were pleased to discover  
A mutual passion for music. Moreover

The Duke was an excellent tenor : could sing  
'*Ange si pure*' in a way to bring down on the wing  
All the angels St. Cicely play'd to. My lord

Would also at times, when he was not too bored,  
Play Beethoven, and Wagner's new music, not ill ;  
With some little things of his own, showing skill.

For which reason, as well as for some others too,  
Their rooms were a pleasant enough rendez-vous.  
Did Lucile, then, encourage (the heartless co-  
quette !)

All the mischief she could not but mark ?

Patience yet !

### III.

In that garden, an arbour, withdrawn from the sun,  
By laburnum and lilac with blooms overrun,  
Form'd a vault of cool verdure, which made, when  
the heat

Of the noontide hung heavy, a gracious retreat.  
And here, with some friends of their own little  
world,

In the warm afternoons, till the shadows uncurl'd  
From the feet of the lindens, and crept thro' the  
grass,



Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.  
 The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,  
 Undeterr'd by tobacco, their work there, and sing  
 Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the  
 bee

Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there  
 was tea

(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,

Fruit, and coffee. 'Ω Ἐσπερε, πάντα φέρεις!

Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided  
 O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,  
 With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a  
 thick head,

And an old Russian Countess both witty and  
 wicked,

And two Austrian Colonels, — that Alfred, who yet  
 Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,

Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow

'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and  
 fro,

And joining her, cried, 'Thank the good stars, we  
 meet!

'I have so much to say to you!'

'Yes? . . .' with her sweet  
 Serene voice, she replied to him . . . 'Yes? and I  
 too

'Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you.'

She was paler just then than her wont was. The  
 sound

Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.

'You are ill?' he exclaim'd.

'No!' she hurriedly said,  
 'No, no!'

'You alarm me!'

She droop'd down her head.

'If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to  
 divine

'The purpose of what has been passing in mine,  
 'My farewell can scarcely alarm you.'

LORD ALFRED.

Lucile !

Your farewell ! you go !

THE COUNTESS.

Yes, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED.

Reveal

The cause of this sudden unkindness.

THE COUNTESS.

Unkind ?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes ! what else is this parting ?

THE COUNTESS.

No, no ! are you blind ?  
Look into your own heart and home. Can you see  
No reason for this, save unkindness in me ?  
Look into the eyes of your wife — those true eyes  
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise  
The sweet soul shining thro' them.

LORD ALFRED.

Lucile ! (first and last  
Be the word, if you will !) let me speak of the past.  
I know now, alas ! tho' I know it too late,  
What pass'd at that meeting which settled my fate.  
Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet ! let it be !  
I but say what is due to yourself — due to me,  
And *must* say it.

He rush'd incoherently on,  
Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,  
To explain how, and whence, he had wrong'd her  
*before,*  
*All the complicate coil wound about him of yore,*

All the hopes that had flown with the faith that  
was fled,  
'And then, O Lucile, what was left me,' he said,  
'When my life was defrauded of you, but to take  
'That life, as 'twas left, and endeavour to make  
'Unobserved by another, the void which remain'd  
'Unconceal'd to myself? If I have not attain'd,  
'I have striven. One word of unkindness has  
never  
'Pass'd my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has  
ever  
'Received my submission. And if, of a truth,  
'I have fail'd to renew what I felt in my youth,  
'I at least have been loyal to what I *do* feel,  
'Respect, duty, honour, affection. Lucile,  
'I speak not of love now, nor love's lone regret :  
'I would not offend you, nor dare I forget  
'The ties that are round me. But may there  
not be  
'A friendship yet hallow'd between you and me ?  
'O Lucile, answer yes ! say, indeed, must I deem  
'That dream of the Greek nothing more than a  
dream,  
'Which, of yore, in our youth, ere it could be  
for us  
'Aught, in truth, save a theme it was sweet to  
discuss  
'With all else of those loved Grecian teachers of  
ours, —  
'That dream of two souls, from the same parent  
powers,  
'Which, tho' virgin in heart, are yet married in  
mind,  
'Like those twin stars which seem, tho' so distant,  
combined ?  
'Is this creed a delusion in faith, and in act  
'A crime ? or, Lucile, may we be not, in fact,  
'To each other yet friends — friends the dearest ?'  
'Alas !'

She replied, 'for one moment, perchance, did it  
pass  
' Thro' my own heart, that dream which for ever  
bath brought  
' To those who indulge it in innocent thought  
' So fatal and evil a waking! But no.  
' For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree  
would grow  
' On the borders of Hades: beyond it, what lies?  
' The wheel of Ixion, alas! and the cries  
' Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,  
' Are the days when with innocence we could dis-  
cuss  
' Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams  
of my life!  
' Oh trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.  
' And I—in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow  
' To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow  
' Not one blush when I first took her hand. With  
no blush  
' Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.  
' Hush! hush!  
' I would say what I wish'd to have said when you  
came.  
' Do not think that years leave us and find us the  
same!  
' The woman you knew long ago, long ago,  
' Is no more. You yourself have within you, I  
know,  
' The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,  
' Whereby the past years will bear fruit. As for  
me,  
' I go my own way, — onward, upward!  
' O yet,  
' Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret,  
' When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled, —  
' The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,  
' But it is not corrupted. I too have at last  
' Lived to learn that love is not — (such love as is  
past,

- ' Such love as youth dreams of at least) — the sole  
     part  
 ' Of life, which is able to fill up the heart;  
 ' Even that of a woman. Whoever indeed  
 ' Is useful cannot be unhappy. This creed  
 ' Fills the void of existence. Between you and me  
 ' Heaven fixes a gulf, over which, you must see,  
 ' That our guardian angels can bear us no more.  
 ' We each of us stand on an opposite shore.  
 ' One step forward, and down the abyss we should  
     sink.  
 ' Oh, the day will come yet, and more soon than  
     you think,  
 ' When life's hopes will all be new born in your  
     heart.  
 ' And I see in it, hidden, yet ready to start  
 ' Into blossom, more brightly than ever, the flower  
 ' Which you deem to be wither'd. For who knows  
     the power  
 ' Of self-renovation in man? What is more,  
 ' You will wake up and find, when this slumber is  
     o'er,  
 ' At your right hand a heart destined, trust me, to  
     prove  
 ' The fulfilment of all you have dream'd of in love.  
 ' Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,  
 ' By an instinct men never attain, to discern  
 ' Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair.  
 ' Matilda is young — see her now, sitting there! —  
 ' How tenderly fashion'd — (oh, is she not, say,)  
 ' To love and be loved?'

## IV.

- He turn'd sharply away —  
 ' Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair;  
 ' Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware;  
 ' *But Matilda's a statue, Matilda's a child;*  
 ' *Matilda loves not —*

Lucile quietly smiled

As she answer'd him :— ' Yesterday, all that you say  
' Might be true ; it is false, wholly false, though,  
to-day.'

' How ? — what mean you ?'

' I mean that to-day,' she replied,  
' The statue with life has become vivified :  
' I mean that the child to a woman has grown :  
' And that woman is jealous.'

' What ! she ?' with a tone  
Of ironical wonder, he answer'd — ' what, she !

' She jealous ! — Matilda ! — of whom, pray ? — not  
me !'

' My lord, you deceive yourself ; no one but you  
' Is she jealous of. Trust, me. And thank Heaven,  
too

' That so lately this passion within her hath grown.  
' For who shall declare, if for months she had  
known

' What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,  
' That knowledge perchance might have cost you  
more dear ?'

' Explain ! explain, madam !' he cried in surprise ;  
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.

' How blind are you men !' she replied. ' Can you  
doubt

' That a woman, young, fair, and neglected — '  
' Speak out !'

He gasp'd with emotion. ' Lucile ! you mean —  
what ?

' Do you doubt her fidelity ?'

' Certainly not.

' Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain .

' Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain

' From touching a subject so fragile. However,

' Bear with me a while, if I frankly endeavour

‘ To invade for one moment your innermost life.  
 ‘ Your honour, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,  
 ‘ Are dear to me, — most dear! And I am con-  
     vinced  
 ‘ That you rashly are risking that honour.’

He winced,  
And turn'd pale, as she spoke.

She had aim'd at his heart,  
And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,  
That her aim had not miss'd.

‘Stay, Lucile!’ he exclaim’d,  
‘What in truth do you mean by these words,  
vaguely framed  
‘To alarm me? Matilda?—my wife?—do you  
know?’—

‘ I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.  
‘ But I know not how far your continued neglect  
‘ Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.  
‘ Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere  
‘ Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet clear,  
‘ Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece  
‘ Which surrounded and hid the celestials in  
Greece  
‘ From the glances of men, would disperse and  
depart  
‘ At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart, —  
‘ For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,  
‘ A disease heal’d too oft by a criminal cure ;  
‘ And the heart left too long to its ravage, in time  
‘ May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime.’

**v.**

‘Such thoughts could have never,’ he falter’d, ‘I  
know,  
‘Reach’d the heart of Matilda.’

‘*But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of themselves*

‘ To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves  
‘ That seek lonely places, — there rarely is wanting  
‘ Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting  
‘ To conjure them to her.’

‘ O lady, beware !

‘ At this moment, around me I search everywhere  
‘ For a clue to your words’ —

‘ You mistake them,’ she said,  
Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.

‘ I was putting a mere hypothetical case’ —

With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.

‘ Woe to him, . . .’ he exclaim’d . . . ‘ woe to him  
that should feel

‘ Such a hope ! for I swear, if he did but reveal

‘ One glimpse, — it should be the last hope of his  
life !’

The clench’d hand and bent eyebrow betoken’d the  
strife

She had roused in his heart.

‘ You forget,’ she began,

‘ That you menace yourself. You yourself are the  
man

‘ That is guilty. Alas ! must it ever be so ?

‘ Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,

‘ And fight our own shadows for ever ? O think !

‘ The trial from which you, the stronger ones,  
shrink,

‘ You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure ;

‘ You bid her be true to the laws you abjure ;

‘ To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,

‘ With the force that has fail’d you ; and that too,  
when under

‘ The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,

‘ The immunity claim’d for yourselves you abuse !

‘ Where the contract exists, it involves obligation

‘ To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.

‘ You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,

‘ A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free.



‘ Then, O Alfred ! be juster at heart : and thank  
 Heaven  
 ‘ That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given  
 ‘ That you have not wherewith to reproach her,  
 albeit  
 ‘ You have cause to reproach your own self, could  
 you see it ! ’

## VI.

In the silence that follow’d the last word she said,  
 In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,  
 Poor Lucile mark’d her words had sufficed to im-  
 part

A new germ of motion and life to that heart  
 Of which he himself had so recently spoken  
 As dead to emotion — exhausted, or broken !  
 New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.  
 In the husband indifferent no more to the wife  
 She already, as she had foreseen, could discover  
 That Matilda had gain’d, at her hands, a new lover.  
 So after some moments of silence, whose spell  
 They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

## VII.

‘ Well ? ’

## VIII.

‘ Lucile,’ he replied, as that soft quiet hand  
 In his own he clasp’d warmly, ‘ I both understand  
 ‘ And obey you.’  
 ‘ Thank Heaven ! ’ she murmur’d.

‘ Oh yet,

‘ One word, I beseech you ! I cannot forget,’  
 He exclaim’d, ‘ we are parting for life. You have  
 shown

‘ My pathway to me : but say, what is your own ? ’  
*The calmness with which until then she had spoken  
 In a moment seem’d strangely and suddenly broken.  
 She turn’d from him nervously, hurriedly.*

‘Nay,  
 ‘I know not,’ she murmur’d, ‘I follow the way  
 ‘Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.  
 ‘I know only that far, far away it must tend  
 ‘From all places in which we have met, or might  
     meet.  
 ‘Far away! — onward — upward!’

    A smile strange and sweet  
 As the incense that rises from some sacred cup  
 And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up  
 Her whole face, with those words.

    ‘Wheresoever it be,  
 ‘May all gentlest angels attend you!’ sigh’d he,  
 ‘And bear my heart’s blessing wherever you are!’  
 And her hand, with emotion, he kiss’d.

## IX.

    From afar  
 That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld  
 With far other emotions: her young bosom swell’d,  
 And her young cheek with anger was crimson’d.

    The Duke  
 Adroitly attracted towards it her look  
 By a faint but significant smile.

## X.

    Much ill-construed,  
 Renown’d Bishop Berkeley has fully, for one,  
     strew’d

With arguments page upon page to teach folks  
 That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.  
 But it surely is hard, since we can’t do without  
     them,

That our senses should make us so oft wish to  
     doubt them!

## CANTO III.

## I.

WHEN first the red savage call'd Man, strode a  
king,  
Thro' the wilds of creation — the very first thing  
That his naked intelligence taught him to feel  
Was the shame of himself; and the wish to conceal  
Was his first step in art. From the apron which  
Eve

In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,  
To the furbelow'd flounce and the broad crinoline  
Of my lady . . . you all know of course whom I  
mean . . .

This art of concealment has greatly increas'd.  
A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast;  
And that drama of passions as old as the hills,  
Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,  
Is only reveal'd now and then to our eyes  
In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

## II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled  
'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough  
trembled,

And the deep-bosom'd lilac, emparadising  
The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and  
sing,

The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen  
only,

*A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely  
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom;  
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,*

Like those who, when Florence was yet in her  
glories,  
Cheated death and kill'd time with Boccaccian  
stories.

But at length the long twilight more deeply grew  
shaded,  
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded.  
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,  
Through the unfooted garden were slumbering  
now.

The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,  
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.  
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf  
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,  
They all seem'd to be saying . . . ' Once more we're  
alone,  
' And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are  
gone!'

## III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,  
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,  
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, look'd  
down

O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was  
their own,

When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,  
And enter'd the garden, unseen, unattended.

Her forehead was aching and parch'd, and her  
breast

By a vague inexpressible sadness oppress'd :  
A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,  
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed, that  
just now

The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled  
Half-stifled, seem'd ready to sink on her head) . . .

*Out into the night air, the silence, the bright  
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!*

Her husband that day had look'd once in her face  
And press'd both her hands in a silent embrace,  
And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection  
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.  
He, of late so indifferent and listless ! . . . at last  
Was he startled and aw'd by the change which had  
pass'd

O'er the once radiant face of his young wife ?  
Whence came

That long look of solicitous fondness ? . . . the same  
Look and language of quiet affection — the look  
And the language, alas ! which so often she took  
For pure love in the simple repose of its purity —  
Her own heart thus lull'd to a fatal security !  
Ha ! would he deceive her again by this kindness ?  
Had she been, then, O fool ! in her innocent blindness

The sport of transparent illusions ? ah folly !  
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,  
She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone  
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,  
For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove  
But a friendship profanely familiar ?

‘ And love ? . . .

‘ What was love, then ? . . . not calm, not secure —  
scarcely kind !

‘ But in one, all intensest emotions combined :

‘ Life and death : pain and rapture : the infinite  
sense

‘ Of something immortal, unknown, and immense ? ’  
Thus, doubting her way, through the dark, the unknown,

The immeasurable, did she wander alone,  
With the hush of night's infinite silence outspread  
O'er the height of night's infinite heavens overhead.

*There, silently crossing, recrossing the night  
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,  
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burn'd,*

And into the infinite ever return'd.  
And, contemplating thus in herself the unknown,  
O'er the heart of Matilda there darted and shone  
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to  
    expire  
Not without leaving traces behind them in fire.

## IV.

All absorb'd in the thoughts which fatigued her, a  
    prey  
To emotions restrain'd through the wearisome day,  
The young wife, released, for a moment, from all  
The day's busy-eyed and inquisitive thrall,  
Instead of rejoining the others, no doubt  
By this time in the salon assembled, stole out  
Unobserved to the garden.

    There, wandering at will,  
She soon found herself, all alone, 'neath that still  
And impalpable bower of lilacs, in which  
The dark air with odours hung heavy and rich,  
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.

    'Twas the place  
In which she so lately had sat, face to face  
With her husband, — and her, the pale stranger  
    detested,  
Whose presence her heart like a plague had in-  
    fested.  
The whole spot with evil remembrance was  
    haunted.  
Through the darkness there rose on the heart  
    which it daunted  
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,  
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away  
The acacias were muttering, like mischievous  
    elves,  
The whole story over again to themselves,  
Each word, — and each word was a wound! By  
    degrees  
*Her memory mingled its voice with the trees,*

And the long-streaming sigh of the night wind  
among them  
Sounded like the reproach which her own heart  
had flung them.

## v.

ὦ πότνια, πότνια Νύξ ! All who grieve  
With life's frustrate desire must, at moments, perceive,

Struggling under the infinite pressure of things,  
The repining, imprison'd, and passionate wings  
Of a restless, but ruin'd and impotent angel,  
Searching, ever in vain, his own penal evangel.  
He strikes with his shoulders the sides of the world ;  
He wails o'er the unwearied sea ; and floats furl'd  
In the sullen career of the storm ; and again  
His purpose dissolves, like a passion, in rain,  
And relentlessly, sighingly, wastes itself out.  
A rainbow, a sunbeam, suffices to rout,  
And refute, and perplex him. But most, when thy  
shade,

Sweet Spirit of Night, over all things is laid,  
With a wistful self-pity, he peers through the bars  
Of his penthouse, and watches his once native  
stars.

He seems to be touch'd at the heart with a sense  
Of his own uncompanion'd, remote, and intense  
Isolation ; and fearfully feels where he may  
For communion with man. Then his voice seems  
to say :

— ' O child of a race by my ruin o'erthrown !  
' O heart, bound to mine by a sorrow unknown !  
' Upon me the Universe heavily lies,  
' And I suffer ! I suffer ! '

And man's heart replies :

' I suffer ! I suffer ! '

## VI.

Perchance (who can tell ?)

Such a voice thro' the silence, the darkness, then  
fell

Like the whisper Eve heard, o'er Matilda's dis-  
traught

Troubled fancy, for ever suggesting the thought  
Of that right which man's heart, as its ultimate  
right

To resist man's injustice, appears to invite, —  
The right of reprisals.

An image uncertain,

And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the cur-  
tain

Of the darkness around her. It came, and it  
went ;

Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent :

It pass'd and repass'd her ; it went and it came

For ever returning ; for ever the same :

And for ever more clearly defined ; till her eyes

In that outline obscure could at last recognise

The man to whose image, the more and the more

That her heart, now arous'd from its calm sleep of  
yore,

From her husband detach'd itself slowly, with  
pain,

Her thoughts had return'd, and return'd to,  
again,

As though by some secret indefinite law, —

The vigilant Frenchman — Eugène de Luvois !

## VII.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By  
some

Night-witchcraft, her vision a fact had become.

On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,

That a man was approaching behind her. She  
knew



‘Lives solitude only for one?  
‘Must its charm by my presence so soon be un-  
done?  
‘Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for  
*this*?—  
‘*The same thought in both hearts,—be it sorrow  
or bliss!*

‘ If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady — you,  
‘ Are you not yet alone, — even though we be two?’

‘ For that,’ . . . said Matilda, . . . ‘ needs were, you  
    should read  
‘ What I have in my heart ’ . . .

    ‘ Think you, lady, indeed,  
‘ You are yet of that age when a woman conceals  
‘ In her heart so completely whatever she feels  
‘ From the heart of the man whom it interests to  
    know  
‘ And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not  
    so,  
‘ Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,  
‘ But I read in your heart as I read in a book.’

‘ Well, Duke! and what read you within it? un-  
    less  
‘ It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,  
‘ And some sadness?’

    ‘ No doubt. To all facts there are laws.  
‘ The effect has its cause, and I mount to the  
    cause.’

## IX.

Matilda shrank back; for she suddenly found  
That a finger was press’d on the yet bleeding  
    wound  
She, herself, had but that day perceived in her  
    breast.

‘ You are sad,’ . . . said the Duke (and that finger  
    yet press’d  
With a cruel persistence the wound it made  
    bleed) —  
‘ You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need  
‘ Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be  
‘ Beloved, and to love. You are sad: for you see

- ‘ That you are not beloved, as you deem’d that you were :  
 ‘ You are sad : for that knowledge hath left you aware  
 ‘ That you have not yet loved, though you thought that you had.  
 ‘ Yes, yes ! . . . you are sad — because knowledge is sad ! ’

He could not have read more profoundly her heart :  
 ‘ What gave you,’ she cried, with a terrified start,  
 ‘ Such strange power ? ’ . . .

- ‘ To read in your thoughts ? ’ he exclaim’d,  
 ‘ O lady, — a love, deep, profound — be it blamed  
 ‘ Or rejected, — a love, true, intense — such, at least,  
 ‘ As you, and you only, could wake in my breast ! ’

‘ Hush, hush ! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity ! ’ she gasp’d,  
 Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had clasp’d  
 In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

- ‘ For pity ? ’ . . . he echoed, . . . ‘ for pity ! and what  
 ‘ Is the pity you owe him ? his pity for you !  
 ‘ He, — the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew !  
 ‘ The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,  
 ‘ And matchless ! (whose happiness did he not swear  
 ‘ To cherish through life ?) he neglects her — for whom ?  
 ‘ For a fairer than she ? No ! the rose in the bloom  
 ‘ Of that beauty which, even when hidd’n, can prevail  
 ‘ To keep sleepless with song the aroused night-  
     ingale,

'Is not fairer ; for even in the pure world of flowers  
'Her symbol is not, and this poor world of ours  
'Has no second Matilda ! For whom ? Let that  
pass !

'Tis not I, 'tis not you, that can name her, alas !  
'And I dare not question or judge her. But  
why,

'Why cherish the cause of your own misery ?  
'Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you ?  
'Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks  
through ?

'And why, since you have but to stretch forth  
your hand,

'The love which you need and deserve to com-  
mand,

'Why shrink ? Why repel it ?'

'O hush, sir ! O hush !'

Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one  
blush.

'Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life !

'Is not Alfred your friend ? and am I not his  
wife ?'

X.

'And have I not, lady,' he answer'd, . . . 're-  
spected

'His rights as a friend, till himself he neglected

'Your rights as a wife ? Do you think 'tis alone

'For three days I have loved you ? My love may  
have grown

'I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,

'In watching their tears, and in sounding your  
sighs.

'But, O lady ! I loved you before I believed

'That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever  
grieved.

'Then, I deem'd you were happy — I deem'd you  
possess'd

‘All the love you deserved, — and I hid in my  
breast  
‘My own love, till this hour — when I could not  
but feel  
‘Your grief gave me the right my own grief to  
reveal!  
‘I knew, years ago, of the singular power  
‘Which Lucile o’er your husband possess’d. Till  
the hour  
‘In which he reveal’d it himself, did I, — say! —  
‘By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?  
‘No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken  
‘Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had  
broken  
‘Which bound *your* heart to him. And now —  
now, that his love  
‘For another hath left your own heart free to  
rove,  
‘What is it, — even now, — that I kneel to implore  
you?  
‘Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you  
‘Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend  
‘On me not one thought, save to think me your  
friend.  
‘Let me speak to you, — ah, let me speak to you  
still!  
‘Hush to silence my words in your heart, if you  
will.  
‘I ask no response: I ask only your leave  
‘To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you  
grieve!’

## XI.

‘Leave me, leave me!’ . . . she gasp’d, with a voice  
thick and low  
From emotion. ‘For pity’s sake, Duke, let me go!  
‘*I feel that to blame we should both of us be,*  
‘*Did I linger.*’  
‘To blame? yes, no doubt!’ . . . answer’d he,

‘ If the love of your husband, in bringing you  
peace,  
‘ Had forbidden you hope, But he signs your re-  
lease  
‘ By the hand of another. One moment ! but one !  
‘ Who knows when, alas ! I may see you alone  
‘ As to-night I have seen you ? or when we may  
meet  
‘ As to-night we have met ? when, entranced at  
your feet,  
‘ As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow  
‘ The thoughts which are pining for utterance  
now ? ’

‘ Duke ! Duke ! ’ . . . she exclaim’d . . . ‘ for heaven’s  
sake let me go !  
‘ It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.  
‘ We must not be seen here together. The night  
‘ Is advancing. I feel overwhelm’d with affright !  
‘ It is time to return to my lord.’

‘ To your lord ? ’

He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word,  
‘ To your lord ? do you think he awaits you, in  
truth ?

‘ Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth ?  
‘ Return to your lord ! . . . his restraint to renew ?  
‘ And hinder the glances which are not for you ?  
‘ No, no ! . . . at this moment his looks seek the  
face  
‘ Of another ! another is there in your place !  
‘ Another consoles him ! another receives  
‘ The soft speech which from silence your absence  
relieves ! ’

XII.

‘ You mistake, sir ! ’ . . . responded a voice, calm,  
severe,  
And sad, . . . ‘ You mistake, sir ! that other is  
here.’

Eugène and Matilda both started.

‘Lucile!’

With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel  
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.

‘Ho, oh!

‘What! eaves-dropping, madam?’ . . . the Duke  
cried . . . ‘And so

‘You were listening?’

‘Say, rather,’ she said, ‘that I heard,

‘Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word, —

‘Heard — and therefore reply.’

‘Belle Comtesse,’ said the Duke,  
With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,  
Which betray’d that he felt himself baffled . . . ‘you  
know

‘That your place is not *here*.’

‘Duke,’ she answer’d him slow,

‘My place is wherever my duty is clear;

‘And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.

‘O lady, this morning my place was beside

‘Your husband, because (as she said *this* she  
sigh’d)

‘I felt that from folly fast growing to crime —

‘The crime of self-blindness — Heaven yet spared  
me time

‘To save for the love of an innocent wife.

‘All that such love deserved in the heart and the  
life

‘Of the man to whose heart and whose life you  
alone

‘Can with safety confide the pure trust of your  
own.’

She turn’d to Matilda, and lightly laid on her  
Her soft, quiet hand . . .

‘’Tis, O lady, the honour

‘Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite

‘Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-  
*night* —

‘ Save for both of you, lady ! for yours I revere ;  
‘ Duc de Luvois, what say you ? — my place is not  
here ? ’

## XIII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,  
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted, and  
sought  
Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.

The Duke stood confounded, and follow’d them not.

But not yet the house had they reach’d when Lu-  
cile

Her tender and delicate burden could feel  
Sink and falter beside her. Oh, then she knelt  
down,

Flung her arms round Matilda, and press’d to her  
own

The poor bosom beating against her.

The moon,  
Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of  
June,

Floated up from the hill-side, sloped over the vale,  
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one  
pale,

Minute, scintillescent, and tremulous star  
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,  
Thus to each of those women revealing the face  
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace  
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame  
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.

With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile  
Trembled visibly yet ; for she could not but feel  
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night,  
And it touch’d her pure brow to a heavenly light.

‘ In the name of your husband, dear lady ; she  
said ;



'In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift  
     your head,  
 'For those blushes are noble. Alas! do not trust  
 'To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,  
 'That the fault of the husband can cancel the  
     wife's.  
 'Take heart! and take refuge and strength in your  
     life's  
 'Pure silence, — there, kneel, pray, and hope,  
     weep, and wait!'

'Saved, Lucile!' sobb'd Matilda, 'but saved to  
     what fate?  
 'Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes.'  
     'Hush!' the sweet voice replied.  
 'Fool'd away by a fancy, again to your side  
 'Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And  
     return,  
 'For the love you can give, with the love that you  
     yearn  
 'To receive, lady. What was it chill'd you both  
     now?  
 'Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how  
 'Love is nourish'd by love. Well! henceforth you  
     will prove  
 'Your heart worthy of love, — since it knows how  
     to love.'

## XIV.

'What gives you such power over me, that I feel  
 'Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?'  
 Sigh'd Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face  
 Of Lucile.

There pass'd suddenly through it the trace  
 Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair forehead came  
     down

A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.

'The pupil of sorrow, perchance' . . . she replied.  
 'Of sorrow?' Matilda exclaim'd . . . 'O confide  
 'To my heart your affliction. In all you made  
     known

‘ I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my own ! ’

‘ And I some consolation, no doubt ; for the tears  
‘ Of another have not flow’d for me many years.’

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand  
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her ; and  
Thus together they enter’d the house.

## XV.

’Twas the room  
Of Matilda.

The languid and delicate gloom  
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft  
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.  
The casement oped into the garden. The pale  
Cool moonlight stream’d through it. One lone  
                  nightingale  
Sung aloof in the laurels.

And here, side by side,  
Hand in hand, the two women sat down undescried,  
Save by guardian angels.

As, when, sparkling yet  
From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels,  
          leaves wet  
The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines  
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines  
As one flower with two faces, in hush’d, tearful  
          speech,  
Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each  
Link’d, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,  
So united, yet diverse, the two women there  
Look’d, indeed, like two flowers upon one droop-  
          ing stem,  
In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.  
All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who  
          knows ?

*All that heart gain’d from heart ?*

Leave the lily, the rose,  
Undisturb'd with their secret within them. For  
who

To the heart of the flow'ret can follow the dew ?

A night full of stars ! O'er the silence, unseen,

The footsteps of sentinel angels, between

The dark land and deep sky were moving. You  
heard

Pass'd from earth up to heaven the happy watch-  
word

Which brighten'd the stars as amongst them it fell

From earth's heart, which it eased. . . : 'All is well !  
all is well !'

## CANTO IV.

## I.

SOLE fountain of song, and sole source of such lays  
As Time cannot quench in the dust of his days,  
Muse or Spirit, that inspirest, since Nature began  
The great epic of Life, the deep drama of Man !  
What matter though skillless the lay be, and rude,  
Or melodiously moving the pure Doric mood,  
If one ray from thy presence, informing his song,  
Should descend on the singer, and lift him along ?  
From the prattle of pedants, the babble of fools,  
From the falsehoods and forms of conventional  
schools,

First and last unappealable arbitress, thou !  
Whose throne is no more on the crest-cloven brow  
Of Parnassus, where first out of Phocis was roll'd,  
From the Heliconiades singing nine-fold,  
The song which the blind son of Mæon set free,  
But deep in the heart of mankind, unto thee,  
Mother Nature, that badest me sing what I feel,  
And canst feel what I sing, unto thee I appeal !  
For the Poets pour wine ; and, when 'tis new, all  
decry it,

But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.  
And Polonius, who praises no wine that's not  
Massic,  
Complains of my verse, that my verse is not clas-  
sic :

And the erudite ladies who take, now and then,  
Tea and toast, with æsthetics, precisely at Ten,  
Have avouch'd that my song is not earnest because  
*Model schools, lodging-houses for paupers, poor  
laws,*

The progress of woman, the great working classes,  
All the age is concern'd in, unnoticed it passes.  
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,  
My earlier verses, sighs 'Commonplace sadly !'  
Tell them, tell them, my song is as old as 'tis new,  
And aver that 'tis earnest because it is true.

Strip from Fashion the garment she wears : what  
remains

But the old human heart, with its joys and its  
pains ?

The same drama that drew to its hopes and its fears  
From the eyes of our fathers both laughter and  
tears.

'Twas conceived in the heart of the first man on  
earth,

By the rivers of Eden when, lone from his birth,  
Through the bowers of Paradise wandering forlorn,  
He pined for the face of an Eve yet unborn :

It was acted in Egypt, when Pharaoh was king ;

It was spoken in Attic, and sung to the string

Of the cithern in Greece ; and in Rome, word for  
word,

It was utter'd by Horace in accents long heard.

Love and grief, strength and weakness, regret and  
desire,

'These have breath'd in all ages from every lyre,

The chant of man's heart, with its ceaseless en-  
deavour ;

As old as the song which the sea sings for ever.

Other men, other manners ! anon from the North,  
With the Hun and the Vandal, unchanged it roll'd  
forth.

New in language alone, it was hymn'd to the harp

Harold bore by the Baltic ; its music fell sharp

With the sword of the Guiscard ; it made Rudel's  
weeping

*Melodious for Melisanth ; still is it keeping*

*In play the perpetual pulses of passion*

*In the heart of mankind ; and whatever the fashi*

Of the garments we wear, 'tis the same life they cover.

When the Greek actor, acting Electra, wept over  
The urn of Orestes, the theatre rose  
And wept with him. What was there in such fictive woes

To thrill a whole theatre? Ah, 'tis his son  
That lies dead in the urn he is weeping upon!  
'Tis no fabled Electra that hangs o'er that urn,  
'Tis a father that weeps his own child.

Men discern  
The man through the mask; the heart moved by  
the heart

Owens the pathos of life in the pathos of art.  
And the heart is the sole grand republic, in which  
All that's human is equal, the poor and the rich:  
The sole indestructible state, time can touch  
With no change: before Rome, before Carthage,  
'twas such

As it will be when London and Paris are gone.  
Save, indeed, that its citizens (time flowing on)  
Thro' the errors and follies of ages improve  
The final dominion of absolute love.

If this world be, indeed, as 'twas said, but a stage,  
The dress only is changed 'twixt the acts of an age.  
From the dark tiring-chamber behind straight re-  
issue

With new masks the old mummers; the very same  
tissue

Of passionate antics that move through the play,  
With new parts to fulfil and new phrases to say.  
The plot grows more complex, more actors appear,  
And the moral perchance glimpses out, there and  
here,

More clearly, approaching the ultimate fall  
Of the curtain that yet hangs unseen. That is all.

*As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly;*

But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly  
 In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,  
 That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.  
 Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard  
 Better far than Longinus himself can reward  
 The appeal to her feelings of which she approves;  
 And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Live the gentle romance! live the page torn  
 asunder

By a light rosy finger with innocent wonder!  
 Live the tale which Næra turns over and over  
 In the rose-colour'd room where she dreams of a  
 lover!

Live the old melodrama of murder and love  
 Which Jane sobs to see from the box up above!  
 Hang it! women, I know, are vain, frivolous, false.  
 I know they care more for a riband, a waltz,  
 A box at the opera, a new *moire antique*,  
 Than for science, philosophy, ethics, or Greek.  
 I know they admire, too, a thousand times more  
 Gardoni, or Mario, or even that bore  
 Colonel \* \* \*, whom the deuce only knows what  
 they say to,

Than Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Newton, or Plato.  
 I know they are silly, deceitful, and worse:  
 Inconceivably spiteful, self-will'd, and perverse;  
 I know they have weak hearts and obstinate  
 wills;

I know that their logic is not Mr. Mill's;  
 I know that their conscience, thank Heaven, is not  
 mine:

That they cant about genius, but cannot divine  
 Its existence, till all the world points with the  
 hand;

That they wear their creed (even the best), second-  
 hand;

*That their love's but a plague which in them doth  
 infuse*

Its contagion from clothes or coin — no matter  
whose.

And I know that the thing they most care for . . .  
but no!

I'll not say it out loud. Never mind what I know.  
But despite of all this, and despite of much more,  
I know I would rather, a hundred times o'er,  
O Neæra, you exquisite infant, whose duty  
Is but to be fair, and whose soul is your beauty,  
Have one smile from your eyes, or one kiss from  
your lips,

One pressure vouchsafed from your fair finger-  
tips,

Than to wear all the laurels that ever with praise  
Impaled human brows — even Dante's brown bays!

Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at his head  
And a brass on his breast, — when a man is once  
dead?

Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon  
were then

Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models  
for men.

The reformer's? — a creed by posterity learnt  
A century after its author is burnt!

The poet's — a laurel that hides the bald brow

It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask Raphael  
now

Which Madonna's authentic! The statesman's? —  
a name

For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!

The soldier's? — three lines on the cold Abbey  
pavement!

Were this all the life of the wise and the brave  
meant,

All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it were  
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,

Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade

And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead.



Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long  
 thought,  
 A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for  
 nought  
 Save the name of John Milton! For all men,  
 indeed,  
 Who in some choice edition may graciously read,  
 With fair illustration, and erudite note,  
 The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,  
 Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this —  
 The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss  
 The grief of the man: Tasso's song — not his  
 madness!  
 Dante's dreams — not his waking to exile and  
 sadness!  
 Milton's music — but not Milton's blindness! . . .

Yet rise,

My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes  
 Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!  
 Say — the life, in the living it, savours of worth:  
 That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:  
 That the fact has a value apart from the fame:  
 That a deeper delight, in the mere labour, pays  
 Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:  
 And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writ-  
 ings were lost,  
 And his genius, though never a trace of it cross'd  
 Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt  
 In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt  
 All that Hamlet hath utter'd, and haply where,  
 pure  
 On its death-bed, wrong'd Love lay, have moan'd  
 with the Moor!

## II.

When Lord Alfred fleet night to the salon re-  
 turn'd  
*He found it desert,* but a plagu'amp dimly burn'd  
*As though half c'* to find itself there

Forced to light for no purpose a room that was bare.

He sat down by the window alone. Never yet  
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget  
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new moon !

The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,  
Wide open to heaven ; and the stars on the stream  
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the dream

Of a lover ; and all things were glad and at rest  
Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.  
He endeavour'd to think — an unwonted employment,

Which appear'd to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

## III.

' Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,

' Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,'

Wrote the tutor of Nero ; who wrote, be it said,  
Better far than he acted — but peace to the dead !  
He bled for his pupil : what more could he do ?  
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,  
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour

He sat with his head droop'd like some stubborn flower

Beaten down by the rush of the rain — with such force

Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course

Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,  
From the cloud that had darken'd the evening for him.

At one moment he rose — rose and open'd the door,

And wistfully look'd down the dark corridor  
 Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with the  
     sigh  
 Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly  
 Back again to his place in a sort of submission  
 To doubt, and return'd to his former position —  
 That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the  
     face,  
 And the eye vaguely fix'd on impalpable space.  
 The dream, which till then had been lulling his  
     life,  
 As once Circe the winds, had seal'd thought; and  
     his wife  
 And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,  
 Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses  
 Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt  
 To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept  
 All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had  
     been  
 Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

## IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,  
 Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,  
 To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,  
 Which was making some noise in the passage  
     without.  
 A sound English voice, with a round English ac-  
     cent,  
 Which the scared German echoes resentfully back  
     sent;  
 The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver  
 Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver,  
 Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot  
 Which reveal'd by its sound no diminutive foot:  
 And the door was flung suddenly open, and on  
*The threshold* Lord Alfred by bachelor John  
*Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or*  
*Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major*

On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow  
With a warmth for which only starvation and  
snow  
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,  
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food  
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.  
Then the two men sat down and scann'd each  
other's faces ;  
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken  
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had  
shaken  
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried,  
At a glance, something wrong.

V.

‘ What’s the matter ? ’ he cried.  
‘ What have you to tell me ? ’

COUSIN JOHN.

What ! have you not heard ?

LORD ALFRED.

Heard what ?

COUSIN JOHN.

This sad business —

LORD ALFRED.

I ? no, not a word.

COUSIN JOHN.

You received my last letter ?

LORD ALFRED.

What then ?

I think so. If not,

COUSIN JOHN.

You have acted upon it ?

LORD ALFRED.

On what?

COUSIN JOHN.

The advice that I gave you —

LORD ALFRED.

Advice? — let me see!

You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.

About Parliament was it?

COUSIN JOHN.

Hang Parliament! no,

The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

LORD ALFRED.

What Bank?

COUSIN JOHN.

Heavens! I know

You are careless; — but surely you have not forgotten, —

Or neglected . . . I warn'd you the whole thing was rotten.

You have drawn those deposits at least?

LORD ALFRED.

No. I meant

To have written to-day; but the note shall be sent To-morrow, however.

COUSIN JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!

Too late! oh, what devil bewitch'd you to wait?

LORD ALFRED.

*Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .*

COUSIN JOHN.

Yes, I do.

LORD ALFRED.

What ! Sir Ridley ? . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Smash'd, broken, blown up, bolted too !

LORD ALFRED.

But his own niece ? . . . In heaven's name, Jack . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Oh, I told you  
The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

LORD ALFRED.

Hold ! you  
Surely can't mean we are ruin'd ?

COUSIN JOHN.

Sit down !

A fortnight ago a report about town  
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas !  
I at once wrote and warn'd you. Well, now let  
that pass.

A run on the Bank about five days ago  
Confirm'd my forebodings too terribly, though.  
I drove down to the City at once : found the door  
Of the Bank closed : the Bank had stopp'd pay-  
ment at four.

Next morning the failure was known to be fraud :  
Warrants out for MacNab ; but MacNab was  
abroad :

Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavour'd to  
get

Information : have learn'd nothing certain as yet —  
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone :

Or with those securities what he had done :  
 Or whether they had been already call'd out :  
 If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.  
 Twenty families ruin'd, they say : what was left, —  
 Unable to find any clue to the cleft  
 The old fox ran to earth in, — but join you as fast  
 As I could, my dear Alfred ? \*

## VI.

He stopp'd here, aghast  
 At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face  
 Had grown livid ; and glassy his eyes fix'd on space.  
 ' Courage, courage ! ' . . . said John, . . . ' bear the  
 blow like a man !'  
 And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred.  
 There ran  
 Through that hand a quick tremor. ' I bear it,' he  
 said,  
 ' But Matilda ? the blow is to her ! ' And his head  
 Seem'd forced down, as he said it.

## COUSIN JOHN.

Matilda ? Pooh, pooh !  
 I half think I know the girl better than you.  
 She has courage enough — and to spare. She  
 cares less  
 Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

## LORD ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

## COUSIN JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it :  
 If you did not avert, you may help her to bear it.

\* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,  
 Took place when Bad News as yet travell'd by horse ;  
 Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzz'd on a wire,  
 Or Time was calcined by electrical fire ;  
 Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,  
 Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

LORD ALFRED.

I might have averted.

COUSIN JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now  
There is clearly no use in considering how,  
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is  
here.

Broken shins are not mended by crying — that's  
clear!

One has but to rub them, and get up again,  
And push on — and not think too much of the  
pain.

And at least it is much that you see that to her  
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must  
stir

And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her sake. Who  
knows?

Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I  
suppose

We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

‘O, Jack, I have been a brute idiot! a beast!

‘A fool! I have sinn’d, and to *her* I have sinn’d!

‘I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind!

‘And now, in a flash, I see all things!’

As tho’

To shut out the vision, he bow’d his head low  
On his hands; and the great tears in silence roll’d  
on,

And fell momentarily, heavily, one after one.

John felt no desire to find instant relief

For the trouble he witness’d.

He guess’d, in the grief  
Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt admission  
Of some error demanding a heartfelt contrition:  
Some *oblivion* perchance which could plead less  
excuse



To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use  
 Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and  
     merely  
 The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.  
 So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down  
 The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own  
 Cordial heart for Matilda.

Thus, silently lost

In his anxious reflections, he cross'd and recross'd  
 The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung  
 O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among  
 The rich curls they were knotting and dragging:  
     and there,  
 That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,  
 The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own  
 Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had  
     grown  
 Unconscious of Alfred.

And so, for a space

There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face

He stopp'd short, and bent on his cousin awhile  
 A pain'd sort of wistful, compassionate smile,  
 Approach'd him, — stood o'er him, — and suddenly  
     laid  
 One hand on his shoulder —

‘Where is she?’ he said.

Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears  
 And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears  
 In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,  
 Unable to answer.

‘Where is she?’ repeated

His cousin.

He motion'd his hand to the door;

‘There, I think,’ he replied. Cousin John said no  
     more,  
 And appear'd to relapse to his own cogitations,

Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.  
So again there was silence.

A timepiece at last  
Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.

Roused by them, he cast  
A half look to the dial; then quietly threw  
His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew  
The hands down from his face.

'It is time she should know  
'What has happen'd,' he said, . . . 'let us go to her  
now.'

Alfred started at once to his feet.

Drawn and ~~van~~  
Though his face, he look'd more than his wont was  
— a man.

Strong, for once, in his weakness Uplifted, fill'd  
through  
With a manly resolve.

If that axiom be true  
Of the '*Sum quia cogito*,' I must opine  
That '*id sum quod cogito*:' — that which, in fine,  
A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of  
thought  
And feeling, the man is himself.

He had fought  
With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow  
The survivor of much which that strife had laid low.  
At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,  
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life  
Which, though yet unfulfil'd, seem'd till then, in  
that name,  
To be his, had he claim'd it. The man's dream of  
fame

And of power fell shatter'd before him; and only  
There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely  
In all save the love he could give her. The lord  
Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record  
That his first thought, and last, at that moment was  
not

Of the power and fame that seem'd lost to his lot,  
But the love that was left to it ; not of the pelf  
He had cared for, yet squander'd ; and not of him-  
self,

But of her ; as he murmur'd,

‘ One moment, dear Jack !

‘ We have grown up from boyhood together. Our  
track

‘ Has been through the same meadows in child-  
hood : in youth

‘ Through the same silent gateways, to manhood.  
In truth,

‘ There is none that can know me as you do ; and  
none

‘ To whom I more wish to believe myself known.

‘ Speak the truth ; you are not wont to mince it, I  
know.

‘ Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.

‘ In despite of a wanton behaviour, in spite

‘ Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might

‘ Have turn'd from me many a heart strong and  
true

‘ As your own, I have never turn'd round and  
miss'd YOU

‘ From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt

‘ By my own blind and heedless self-will brought  
about.

‘ Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake

‘ Of those old recollections of boyhood that make

‘ In your heart yet some clinging and crying ap-  
peal

‘ From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but  
feel

‘ Might have sentenced our friendship to death  
long ago ?

‘ Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so !)

‘ That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,

‘ Your heart has divined in me something superior  
‘ To that which I seem ; from my innermost nature

‘ Not wholly expell’d by the world’s usurpature ?  
‘ Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire  
‘ For truth ? Some one spark of the soul’s native  
fire  
‘ Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust  
‘ Which life hath heap’d o’er it ? Some one fact to  
trust  
‘ And to hope in ? Or by you alone am I deem’d  
‘ The mere frivolous fool I so often have seem’d  
‘ To my own self ? ’

COUSIN JOHN.

No, Alfred ! you will, I believe,  
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you  
grieve,  
For having belied your true nature so long.  
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong !

‘ Do you think,’ he resumed . . . ‘ what I feel while  
I speak  
‘ Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak  
‘ As these weak tears would seem to betoken it ? ’

COUSIN JOHN.

No !

LORD ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin ! your hand then. And now I  
will go  
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

COUSIN JOHN.

I do. But ’tis late.  
If she sleeps, you’ll not wake her ?

## LORD ALFRED.

No, no ! it will wait  
 (Poor infant !) too surely, this mission of sorrow ;  
 If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-  
 morrow.

He open'd the door, and pass'd out.

Cousin John  
 Watch'd him wistful, and left him to seek her  
 alone.

## IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knock'd at her  
 door,  
 He could hear no reply from within. Yet once  
 more  
 He knock'd lightly. No answer. The handle he  
 tried :  
 The door open'd : he enter'd the room undescried.

## X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light  
 Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the  
 night,  
 The pale lamp an indistinct radiance shed  
 Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy  
 bed  
 Matilda was kneeling ; so wrapt in deep prayer  
 That she knew not her husband stood watching her  
 there.  
 With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a  
 faint  
 And unearthly effulgence which seem'd to acquaint  
 The whole place with a sense of deep peace made  
 secure  
*By the presence of something angelic and pure.*  
*And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the*  
*tomb*

Where Love lies, than the lady that kneel'd in that  
gloom.

She had put off her dress ; and she look'd to his  
eyes

Like a young soul escaped from its earthly dis-  
guise ;

Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,

And over them rippled her soft golden hair ;

Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced

Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.

As the light that, from water reflected, for ever  
Trembles up thro' the tremulous reeds of a river,  
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in  
him,

Thro' the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and  
dim,

Reproducing itself in the broken and bright

Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.

That sight  
Bow'd his heart, bow'd his knee. Knowing scarce  
what he did

To her side through the chamber he silently slid,  
And knelt down beside her—and pray'd at her  
side.

## XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried  
That her husband was near her ; suffused with the  
blush

Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush  
Where the tears sparkled yet.

As a young fawn uncouches,  
Shy with fear, from the fern where some hunter  
approaches,

She shrank back ; he caught her, and circling his  
arm

Round her waist, on her brow press'd one kiss  
long and warm.

Then her fear changed in impulse ; and hiding her  
face

On his breast, she hung lock'd in a clinging em-  
brace

With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as  
though

She fear'd, if their clasp were relax'd, he would  
go :

Her smooth naked shoulders, uncared for, con-  
vulsed

By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed

In its pressure on his, as the effort within it

Lived and died with each tender tumultuous min-  
ute.

' O Alfred, O Alfred ! forgive me,' she cried —

' Forgive me !'

' Forgive you, my poor child !' he sigh'd ;

' But I never have blamed you for aught that I  
know,

' And I have not one thought that reproaches you  
now.'

From her arms he unwound himself gently. And  
so

He forced her down softly beside him. Below

The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.

And, he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,

' When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at  
length

' That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,

' But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own

' The weakness which thus to himself hath been  
shown ?

' From whom seek the strength which his need of  
is sore,

' Altho' in his pride he might perish, before

' He could plead for the one, or the other avow

' *Mid his intimate friends ?* Wife of mine, tell me  
now,

' *Do you join me in feeling, in that darken'd hour,*

‘The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power

‘To be at his side, is the woman that shares

‘His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears

‘The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life

‘She has mingled her own with, — in short, that man’s wife?’

‘Yes,’ murmur’d Matilda, ‘O yes!’

‘Then,’ he cried,

‘This chamber in which we two sit, side by side,

(And his arm, as he spoke, seem’d more softly to press her)

‘Is now a confessional — *you*, my confessor!’

‘I?’ she falter’d, and timidly lifted her head.

‘Yes! but first answer one other question,’ he said:

‘When a woman once feels that she is not alone;

‘That the heart of another is warm’d by her own;

‘That another feels with her whatever she feel,

‘And halves her existence in woe or in weal;

‘That a man for her sake will, so long as he lives,

‘Live to put forth his strength which the thought of her gives;

‘Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;

‘Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow;

‘Will that woman feel less than another, O say,

‘The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?

‘Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,

‘That they brighten the heart, tho’ they darken the home?’

She turn’d, like a soft rainy heaven, on him

Eyes that smiled thro’ fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.

‘That woman,’ she murmur’d, ‘indeed were thrice blest!’

‘Then courage, true wife of my heart!’ to his breast

*As he folded and gather’d her closely, he cried.*



‘ For the refuge, to-night in these arms open’d wide  
‘ To your heart, can be never closed to it again,  
‘ And this room is for both an asylum ! For when  
‘ I pass’d thro’ that door, at the door I left there  
‘ A calamity, sudden, and heavy to bear.  
‘ One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,  
‘ We must face it henceforth ; but it enters not  
here.

‘ For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone  
‘ A heart which calamity leaves all your own !’  
She started . . . ‘ Calamity, Alfred ! to you ?’  
‘ To both, my poor child, but ’twill bring with it too  
‘ The courage, I trust, to subdue it.’

‘ O speak !

‘ Speak !’ she falter’d in tones timid, anxious, and  
weak.

‘ O yet for a moment,’ he said, ‘ hear me on !  
‘ Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,  
‘ Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,  
‘ That sport in the sunbeam, and play thro’ the  
skies  
‘ While the skies smile, and heed not each other :  
at last,  
‘ When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky over-  
cast,  
‘ Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings ?  
‘ So indeed the morn found us, — poor frivolous  
things !  
‘ Now our sky is o’ercast, and our sunbeam is set,  
‘ And the night brings its darkness around us. Oh,  
yet,  
‘ Have we weather’d no storm thro’ those twelve  
cloudless hours ?  
‘ Yes ; you, too, have wept !

‘ While the world was yet ours,

‘ *While its sun* was upon us, its incense stream’d  
to us,

‘ *And its myriad* voices of joy seem’d to woo us,

‘ We stray’d from each other, too far, it may be,  
‘ Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see  
‘ How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how  
    great  
‘ Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my  
    fate !  
‘ But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,  
‘ Watching o’er us, to warn, and to rescue !

    ‘ That smile  
‘ Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you  
    eyed  
‘ With resentment, an angel’s they were at your  
    side  
‘ And at mine ; nor perchance is the day all so far,  
‘ When we both in our prayers, when most heart-  
    felt they are,  
‘ May murmur the name of that woman now gone  
‘ From our sight evermore.

    ‘ Here, this evening, alone,  
‘ I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart  
‘ Unto yours, — from this clasp be it never to part !  
‘ Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,  
‘ But a prize richer far than that fortune has won  
‘ It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,  
‘ ’Tis the heart of my wife !’ With suffused happy  
    eyes

She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide  
    apart,

And, tenderly closing them round him, his heart  
Clasp’d in one close embrace to her bosom ; and  
    there

Droop’d her head on his shoulder ; and sobb’d.

    Not despair,  
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,  
Flow’d in those happy tears, so oblivious she was  
Of all save the sense of her own love ! Anon,  
However, his words rush’d back to her. ‘ All gone,  
‘ The fortune you brought me !’

And eyes that were dim

With soft tears she upraised : but those tears were  
for him.

‘Gone ! my husband ?’ she said, ‘tell me all ! see !  
I need,

‘To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,

‘Fuller sense of affliction.’

‘Poor innocent child !’

He kiss’d her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled.

‘Your uncle has fail’d, and we know nothing more.

‘There still rest my own smaller means, as before,

‘And my heart, and my brain, and my right hand  
for you ;

‘And with these, my Matilda, what may I not  
do ?

‘You know not, I knew not myself till this hour,

‘Which so sternly reveal’d it, my nature’s full  
power.’

‘And I too,’ she murmur’d, ‘I too am no more

‘The mere infant at heart you have known me  
before.

‘I have suffer’d since then. I have learn’d much  
in life.

‘O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,

‘The heart I have learn’d as a woman to feel !

‘For I — love you, my husband !’

As though to conceal

Less from him, than herself, what that motion ex-  
press’d,

She dropp’d her bright head, and hid all on his  
breast.

‘O lovely as woman, belovèd as wife !

‘Evening star of my heart, light for ever my life !

‘If from eyes fix’d too long on this base earth thus  
far

‘You have miss’d your due homage, dear guardian  
star,

‘Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,

‘There I see you, and know you, and bless the light  
given

‘ To lead me to life’s late achievement ; my own,  
‘ My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one ! ’

## XII.

How lovely she look’d in the lovely moonlight,  
That stream’d thro’ the pane from the blue balmy  
night !

How lovely she look’d in her own lovely youth,  
As she clung to his side full of trust, and of truth !  
How lovely to *him*, as he tenderly press’d  
Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caress’d  
The glittering tresses which now shaken loose  
Shower’d gold in his hand, as he smooth’d them !

## XIII.

O Muse,  
Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart  
‘ Twixt these two silent souls ! There’s a joy be-  
yond art,  
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

## XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at  
least !

No music, save such as the nightingales sung,  
Breath’d their bridals abroad ; and no cresset, up-  
hung,

Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was  
given

From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple  
heaven.

He open’d the casement : he led her with him,  
Hush’d in heart, to the terrace, dipp’d cool in the  
dim

Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They  
heard

Aloof the invisible, rapturous bird,  
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands :  
they saw

Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw  
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with  
cheer  
From the throat of the vale; o'er the dark-sapphire  
sphere  
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,  
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the  
sheep  
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace; from unknown  
Hollow glooms freshen'd odours around them were  
blown  
Intermittingly; then the moon dropp'd from their  
sight,  
Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light  
Which no longer they needed to read on the face  
Of each other life's last revelation.

The place

Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that  
never  
Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavour  
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,  
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green  
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,  
And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms  
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that halts  
not  
His forces, how lovely soever the spot  
Where their march lies — the wary, grey strategist,  
Time,  
With the armies of Life, lay encamp'd — Grief and  
Crime,  
Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; maturing,  
For his great war with man, new surprises; securing  
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe  
*To his last narrow refuge — the grave.*

## XV.

Sweetly though  
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and  
sweetly  
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, com-  
pletely  
Confiding in that yet untrodden existence  
Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resist-  
ance  
And struggle ; to-night, Love his hallow'd device  
Hung forth, and proclaim'd his serene armistice.



No sound, save the voice of the long river wave,  
And the crickets that sing all the night!

She stood still,  
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curl'd on the  
hill.

Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,  
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.  
Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken  
look,

Didst thou read then in Nature's weird heart-break-  
ing book?

Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and  
who

Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?

Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?

What leads forth in his season the bright Maza-  
roth?

Hath the darkness a dwelling, — save there, in  
those eyes?

And what name hath that half-reveal'd hope in the  
skies?

Ay, question, and listen! What answer?

The sound  
Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled  
bound,

And the crickets that sing all the night.

There are hours  
Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,  
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all  
That to this race of worms, — stinging creatures,  
that crawl,

Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own  
stings, —

Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.

When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath  
pass'd

Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last;  
When she traverses nature and space, till she  
stands



In the Chamber of Fate ; where, through tremulous  
 hands,  
 Hum the threads from an old-fashion'd distaff un-  
 curl'd,  
 And those three blind old women sit spinning the  
 world.

## III.

The dark was blanch'd wan, overhead. One green  
 star  
 Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar ;  
 The spirits of change, and of awe, with faint breath,  
 Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.  
 The spirits of awe and of change were around,  
 And about, and upon her.

A dull muffled sound,  
 And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,  
 And she felt herself fix'd by the hot hollow eyes  
 Of the Frenchman before her : those eyes seem'd  
 to burn,  
 And scorch out the darkness between them, and  
 turn  
 Into fire as they fix'd her. He look'd like the  
 shade  
 Of a creature by fancy from solitude made,  
 And sent forth by the darkness to scare and op-  
 press  
 Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

## IV.

' At last, then — at last, and alone, — I and thou,  
 ' Lucile de Nevers, have we met ? ' Hush ! I know  
 ' Not for me was the tryst. Never mind ! it is  
 mine ;  
 ' And whatever led hither those proud steps of  
 thine,  
 ' *They remove not, until we have spoken. My  
 hour*

'Is come ; and it holds thee and me in its power,  
'As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'Tis  
well !

'The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell  
'Of her first lover's vows listen'd, hush'd with de-  
light,

'When soft stars were brightly uphanging the  
night,

'Never listen'd, I swear, more unquestioningly,

'Than thy fate hath compell'd thee to listen to  
me !'

To the sound of his voice, as though out of a  
dream,

She appear'd with a start to awaken.

The stream,

When he ceased, took the night with its moaning  
again,

Like the voices of spirits departing in pain.

'Continue,' she answer'd, 'I listen to hear.'

For a moment he did not reply.

Through the drear

And dim light between them, she saw that his face  
Was disturb'd. To and fro he continued to pace,  
With his arms folded close, and the low restless  
stride

Of a panther, in circles around her, first wide,

Then narrower, nearer, and quicker. At last

He stood still, and one long look upon her he cast:

'Lucile, dost thou dare to look into my face ?

'Is the sight so repugnant ? ha, well ! Canst thou  
trace

'One word of thy writing in this wicked scroll,

'With thine own name scrawl'd thro' it, defacing a  
soul ?'

In his face there was something so wrathful and  
wild,

That she could not but shudder.

He saw it, and smiled,

And then turn'd him from her, renewing again

That short restless stride ; as though searching in  
vain

For the point of some purpose within him.

‘ Lucile,  
‘ You shudder to look in my face : do you feel

‘ No reproach when you look in your own heart ?’

‘ No, Duke,  
‘ In my conscience I do not deserve your rebuke :

‘ Not yours !’ she replied.

‘ No,’ he mutter’d again,  
‘ Gentle justice ! you first bid Life hope not, and  
then

‘ To Despair you say “ Act not ! ”’

V.

He watch’d her awhile  
With a chill sort of restless and suffering smile.

They stood by the wall of the garden. The skies,  
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague prophe-  
cies

Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon had long  
set,

And all in a glimmering light, pale, and wet  
With the night-dews, the white roses sullenly  
loom’d

Round about her. She spoke not. At length he  
resumed.

‘ Wretched creatures we are ! I and thou — one  
and all !

‘ Only able to injure each other, and fall

‘ Soon or late, in that void which ourselves we pre-  
pare

to see that we boast of ! weak insects we

‘Gone! all gone! and the wail of the night wind  
sounds human,  
‘Bewailing those once nightly visitants! Woman,  
‘Woman, what hast thou done with my youth?  
Give again,  
‘Give me back the young heart that I gave thee . . .  
in vain!’  
‘Duke!’ she falter’d.  
‘Yes, yes!’ he went on, ‘I was not  
‘Always thus! what I once was, I have not forgot.’

## VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there  
stirr’d  
Through his voice an emotion that swept every  
word  
Into one angry wail; as, with feverish change,  
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.  
‘I remember the time! — for it haunts me even  
yet  
‘Like a ghost, through the Hades of lifelong re-  
gret —  
‘I remember the time when the spirits of June  
‘Led the faint-footed dance of the flowers to the  
tune  
‘That was sung by the sons of the morning of old,  
‘When the sun first came forth from his chambers  
of gold.  
‘Then I saw round the rosy horizon of things  
‘The omnipotent Hours, in Olympian rings,  
‘Charioteering in glory; the world seem’d to glow  
‘Where they circled and swept, each a crown on  
his brow!  
‘Then the gods in the twilight descended, and then  
‘The yet homely Immortals abided with men.  
‘Then the oak flow’d with heaven-colour’d honey,  
and the lymph  
‘Was the dwelling divine of a white-footed nymph:  
‘Then all men were bold, and all women were fair:

- ‘ And Love — a light impulse alive on the air,  
‘ Flitted, folded for aye in his own happy dream,  
‘ Flitted here, flitted there, like a bee on a beam,  
‘ Wherever new flow’rets, by lawn or by dell,  
‘ Held on tiptoe for him their divine ænomel !  
‘ I remember the time, for my spirit was stirr’d,  
‘ When afar off the voice of the turtle was heard  
‘ “ Arise ! come away ! ” I arose. O despair !  
‘ Led by what lying star, through what verdurous  
    snare,  
‘ By what pathway dissembling in falsehood so  
    sweet  
‘ A peril so fatal to me, did we meet ?  
‘ Oh, could I not take up the parable too,  
‘ As it fell from your lips, with a scorn all as true ?  
‘ Woe to him, in whose nature, once kindled, the  
    torch  
‘ Of Passion burns downward to blacken and  
    scorch !  
‘ Woe to him that hath kiss’d and caroused cheek  
    by jowl  
‘ With the harlot Corruption, and drain’d her wild  
    bowl !  
‘ But shame, shame, and sorrow, O woman, to thee,  
‘ Whose hand sow’d the first seed of destruction in  
    me !  
‘ Whose lip taught the first lesson of falsehood to  
    mine !  
‘ Whose looks first made me doubt lies that look’d  
    so divine !  
‘ My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep :  
‘ And if tears I mistrust, ’tis that thou too canst  
    weep !  
‘ Well ! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake  
‘ In the love of a man, what more change need it  
    make  
‘ *In the steps of his soul through the course love  
    began,*  
‘ *Than all other mistakes in the life of a man ?*

- ‘ And I said to myself, “ I am young yet: too  
young  
‘ To have wholly survived my own portion among  
‘ The great needs of man’s life, or exhausted its  
joys;  
‘ What is broken? one only of youth’s pleasant  
toys!  
‘ Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,  
‘ For one passion survived? No! the roses will  
blow  
‘ As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,  
‘ Not less sweetly for one blossom cancell’d from  
Spring!  
‘ Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet re-  
mains  
‘ All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The  
plains  
‘ And the hills with each summer their verdure  
renew:  
‘ Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as  
they do.  
‘ Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living  
divine  
‘ Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be  
the sign!  
  
‘ Since the bird of the wood flits and sings round  
the nest  
‘ Where lie broken the eggs she once warm’d with  
her breast;  
‘ Since the flower of the field, newly born yester-  
day,  
‘ When to-morrow a new bud hath burst on the  
spray,  
‘ Folds, and falls in the night, unrepining, un-  
seen;  
‘ Since aloof in the forests, when forests are green,  
‘ You may hear through the silence the dead wood  
that cracks,

- ‘ Since man, where his course throughout nature  
he tracks,  
‘ In all things one science to soothe him may find,  
‘ To walk on, and look forward, and never be-  
hind,  
‘ — What to me, O my heart, is thy joy or thy  
sorrow ?  
‘ What the tears of to-day or the sneers of to-  
morrow ?  
‘ What is life ? what is death ? what the false ?  
what the true ?  
‘ And what is the harm that one woman can do ? ”
- ‘ Vain ! all vain ! . . . For when, laughing, the wine  
I would quaff,  
‘ I remember’d too well all it cost me to laugh.  
‘ Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,  
‘ Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me  
they stirr’d,  
‘ In the night wind, the starlight, the murmurs of  
even,  
‘ In the ardours of earth, and the languors of  
heaven,  
‘ I could trace nothing more, nothing more through  
the spheres,  
‘ But the sound of old sobs, and the tracks of old  
tears !  
‘ It was with me the night long in dreaming or  
waking,  
‘ It abided in loathing, when daylight was break-  
ing,  
‘ The burthen of the bitterness in me ! Behold  
‘ All my days were become as a tale that is told.  
‘ And I said to my sight, “ No good thing shalt  
thou see,  
‘ For the noonday is turnèd to darkness in me.  
‘ *In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made.”*  
‘ *And I said to the grave, “ Lo, my father ! ” and*  
*said*

‘ To the worm, “ Lo, my sister ! ” The dust to the  
dust,  
‘ And one end to the wicked shall be with the  
just ! ’

## VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night,  
And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct  
light

A voice clear, and tender, and pure, with a tone  
Of ineffable pity replied to his own.

‘ And say you, and deem you, that I wreck’d your  
life ?

‘ Alas ! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife

‘ By a fraud of the heart which could yield you  
alone

‘ For the love in your nature a lie in my own,

‘ Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you  
worse ?

‘ Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,

‘ For I then should have wrong’d you ! ’

‘ Wrong’d ! ah, is it so ?

‘ You could never have loved me ? ’

‘ Duke ! ’

‘ Never ? oh no ! ’

(He broke into a fierce angry laugh, as he said)

‘ Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you : you led

‘ My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,

‘ All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power

‘ Shut up in that cold face of yours ! was this well ?

‘ But enough ! not on you would I vent the wild  
hell

‘ Which has grown in my heart. Oh that man,  
first and last

‘ He tramples in triumph my life ! he has cast

‘ His shadow ’twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass !

‘ My hate yet may find him ! ’

She murmur’d, ‘ Alas !

‘ These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply.



‘ Enough, Duc de Luvois ! farewell. I shall try  
 ‘ To forget every word I have heard, every sight  
 ‘ That has grieved and appall’d me in this wretched  
     night

‘ Which must witness our final farewell. May  
     you, Duke,

‘ Never know greater cause your own heart to  
     rebuke

‘ Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have  
     had !

‘ Adieu !’

    ‘ Stay, Lucile, stay !’ . . . he groan’d,

    . . . ‘ I am mad,

‘ Brutalised, blind with pain ! I know not what I  
     said.

‘ I meant it not. But ’ (he moan’d, drooping his  
     head)

‘ I suffer, and pain is perchance all unjust ;

‘ ’Tis the worm trodden down that yet stings in the  
     dust.

‘ Forgive me ! I — have I so wrong’d you, Lucile ?

‘ I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me !’

    ‘ I feel

‘ Only sad, very sad to the soul,’ she said, ‘ far,

‘ Far too sad for resentment.’

    ‘ Yet stand as you are

‘ One moment,’ he murmur’d. ‘ I think, could I  
     gaze

‘ Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days

‘ Would come back upon me, and this scorching  
     heart

‘ Free itself in hot tears. Do not, do not depart

‘ Thus, Lucile ! stay one moment. I know why  
     you shrink,

‘ Why you shudder ; I read in your face what you  
     think.

‘ Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,

‘ *Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.*

‘ *Do not fear I should justify aught I have done.*

- ‘ I feel I have sinn’d. Yet this night you have  
won  
‘ A great battle from me. Teach, O teach me to  
bear  
‘ The defeat I have merited ! Teach my despair  
‘ Some retributive penance to purge this foul past  
‘ And work out life’s penal redemption at last !  
‘ Only speak !’  
‘ Could I help you,’ she murmur’d, ‘ my heart  
‘ Would bless heaven indeed if before we thus part  
‘ I could rescue from out the wild work of this  
night  
‘ One holier memory, one gleam of light  
‘ Out of this hour of darkness ! But what can I  
say ?  
‘ This deep sense of pity seems utterless !’  
‘ Nay,  
‘ I have suffer’d,’ he answer’d, ‘ but yet do not  
think  
‘ That, whatever my fate, I have shrunk, or do  
shrink.  
‘ When the peasant, at nightfall, regaining the  
door  
‘ Of his hut, finds the tempest hath been there  
before ;  
‘ That the thunder hath wasted the harvest he  
sow’d,  
‘ And the lightning to ashes consumed his abode ;  
‘ The wild fact to his senses one moment may  
seem  
‘ Like a haggard, confused, and unnatural dream :  
‘ The vast night is sombre all round him ; the  
earth  
‘ Smoulders lurid and angry ; he stands on his  
hearth  
‘ And looks round for the welcome of old, and the  
place  
‘ Where his wife used to sit with the smile on her  
face ;

- ‘ A heap of red ashes lies strewn on the heath.  
‘ But in darkness of night, and with silence of death,  
‘ He sits down, and already reflects on the morrow.  
‘ So I, in the night of my life, with my sorrow !  
‘ Ah ! but henceforth in vain shall I till that wild field.  
‘ It is blasted : no harvest these furrows will yield.  
‘ True ! my life hath brought forth only evil, and there  
‘ The wild wind hath planted the wild weed : yet ere  
‘ You exclaim, “ Fling the weed to the flames,” think again  
‘ Why the field is so barren. With all other men  
‘ First love, though it perish from life, only goes  
‘ Like the primrose that falls to make way for the rose.  
‘ For a man, at least most men, may love on through life :  
‘ Love in fame ; love in knowledge ; in work : earth is rife  
‘ With labour, and therefore with love, for a man.  
‘ If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan  
‘ Of man’s life includes love in all objects ! But I ?  
‘ All such loves from my life through its whole destiny  
‘ Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas !  
‘ Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that pass !  
‘ It perish’d, and all perish’d with it. Ambition ?  
‘ Wealth left nothing to add to my social condition.  
‘ Fame ? But fame in itself presupposes some great  
‘ Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State ?  
‘ I, to cringe to an upstart ? The Camp ? I, to draw  
‘ From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of Luvois  
‘ To defend usurpation ? Books, then ? Science, Art ?

' But, alas ! I was fashion'd for action : my heart,  
 ' Wither'd thing though it be, I should hardly com-  
   press  
 ' 'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics : life's  
   stress  
 ' Needs scope, not contraction ! what rests ? to wear  
   out  
 ' At some dark northern court an existence, no  
   doubt,  
 ' In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause  
 ' As hopeless as is my own life ! By the laws  
 ' Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,  
 ' I am what I am !'

## VIII.

                                          For a while she was mute.  
 Then she answer'd, ' We are our own fates. Our  
   own deeds  
 ' Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made not for  
   men's creeds,  
 ' But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might  
   say  
 ' That all life attests, that " the will makes the  
   way."  
 ' I might say, in a world full of lips that lack bread  
 ' And of souls that lack light, there are mouths to  
   be fed,  
 ' There are wounds to be heal'd, there is work to  
   be done,  
 ' And life can withhold love and duty from none.  
 ' Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,  
 ' Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less  
   worth  
 ' Our upholding, because the white lily no more  
 ' Is as sacred as all that it bloom'd for of yore ?  
 ' Yet be that as it may be ; I cannot perchance  
 ' Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and  
   France  
 ' *Has* for me simpler duties. Large hope, though,  
   Eugène

' De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in  
 pain,  
 ' Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul  
 ' That the great master hand which sweeps over  
 the whole  
 ' Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch  
 ' To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means  
 to fetch  
 ' Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,  
 ' Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,  
 ' Whose faculties, flaccid it may be, if less  
 ' Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had fail'd to ex-  
 press  
 ' Just the one note the great final harmony needs.  
 ' And what best proves there's life in a heart? —  
 that it bleeds!  
 ' Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,  
 ' Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain!  
 ' Cease the sin with the sorrow! See morning be-  
 gin!  
 ' Pain must burn itself out if not fuell'd by sin.  
 ' There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon  
 light.  
 ' Let hate and despondency die with the night!'

He was moved by her words. As some poor  
 wretch confined  
 In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose  
 mind  
 Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear  
 A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,  
 And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,  
 Singing thro' the caged lattice a once well-known  
 strain,  
 Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until  
 The mind's ruin'd *re* vices graciously fill  
 With music and mirth, and, as it were,  
*The long-troubled* grows slowly aware  
*Of the mockery* *irruption*, and shrinks from each  
 thing

It once sought,—the poor idiot who pass'd for a  
king,  
Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now confess'd

A madman more painfully mad than the rest,—  
So the sound of her voice, as it there wander'd o'er  
His echoing heart, seem'd in part to restore  
The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole  
Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul  
Reflected on his: he appear'd to awake  
From a dream, and perceived he had dream'd a  
mistake:

His spirit was soften'd, yet troubled in him:  
He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim.  
But he murmur'd . . .

‘ Lucile, not for me that sun's light  
Which reveals — not restores — the wild havoc of  
night.

‘ There are some creatures born for the night, not  
the day.

‘ Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray;  
‘ And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow  
tower

‘ Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my  
dower.

‘ Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by  
which eyes

‘ Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognise

‘ Enough desolation.’

‘ Take comfort,’ she said,  
‘ Above all,—that in mercy, this night, I was led  
‘ To save you, in saving another! Oh yet,  
‘ Thank heaven that you have not quite barter'd  
regret

‘ For remorse, nor the sad self-redemptions of grief

‘ For a self-retribution beyond all relief!’

## IX.

‘ Retribution!’ he falter'd. ‘ Ah, that work begins.

' Could you see but the process ! Whatever my  
     sins,  
 ' I will live on myself to avenge them, Lucile.  
 ' And if aught on this darkness now gleams, 'tis the  
     steel  
 ' That executes judgment. My own hand lays  
     bare  
 ' The axe that awaits me !'  
     ' Alas, Duke, beware !  
 ' There is a remorse which is sin crowning sin.  
 ' There is a humility which is akin  
 ' To the pride of perdition. The pride that claims  
     here  
 ' On earth to itself (howsoever severe  
 ' To itself it may be) God's dread office and right  
 ' Of punishing sin, is a sin in heaven's sight,  
 ' And against heaven's service. Leave heaven's  
     work to heaven !  
 ' Let us pray, not indeed to be judged, but for-  
     given ;  
 ' Pray for pardon, not penance. Eugène de Luvois,  
 ' Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the  
     law.  
 ' Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all  
 ' His own executioner. Man's pride must fall  
 ' When it stands up in judgment. Then kneel  
     Eugène, kneel,  
 ' And hope, kneeling and praying !' she murmur'd.  
     ' Lucile,'  
 He exclaim'd, and unconsciously sank on his knees,  
 Overawed by her look.

Then, by solemn degrees,  
 There crept on the midnight within him a cold  
 Keen gleam of spiritual light. Fold by fold,  
 The films of his self-gather'd blindness, in part  
 Were breath'd bare, and the dawn shudder'd into  
     his heart.

*She was silent. At length he look'd upward, and*

That sad serene countenance, mournful as law  
And tender as pity, bow'd o'er him : and heard  
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.  
The dawn, and the dews of the dawn ! . . . To his  
          eyes,  
Tears, he felt them, youth's long-lost familiars,  
          arise !

## X.

' O Lucile ! my predestined, inscrutable fate !  
' Thou hast forced me to weep, but the tears flow  
          too late.  
' Why, I know not ! they cannot extinguish the fire  
' That consumes me. Leave, leave me the scorn  
          and the ire  
' Which are all that can yet give me strength to  
          resign  
' Those gentler emotions which might have been  
          mine.'

## XI.

' Scorn and Ire are but shadows that stand at the  
          gate  
' Of the Heavenly Land,' she replied. ' Scorn and  
          bate  
' Have no life in themselves. They are devil-born  
          things —  
' 'Tis our cowardice only that gives to them stings.  
' They may scare the rash fool, but they cannot  
          dismay  
' The hero predestin'd to conquer his way.  
' From the eye that hath courage to look in their  
          face  
' They shrink into darkness, and leave not a trace  
' On the soul, save the sense of a solemn thanks-  
          giving  
' For the danger subdued, and the strength found  
          in striving,  
' When she enters the calm that is conquer'd from  
          strife,



**'For all that you miss, and for all that you need.'**

*Thro' the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she  
spoke,  
A clear chilly chime from a church-turret broke;*

And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the  
bell

On his ear, where he kneel'd, softly, soothingly  
fell.

All within him was wild and confused, as within  
A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,  
Where, passing, wild travellers paused, overnight,  
To quaff and carouse ; in its socket each light  
Is extinct ; crash'd the glasses, and scrawl'd is the  
wall

With wild ribald ballads : serenely o'er all,  
For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light  
creeps faint

Thro' the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a saint  
Seen thro' some broken frame appears noting  
meanwhile

The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.

And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness  
half drawn

Oped behind her ; and pure as the pure light of  
dawn

She stood, bathed in morning, and seem'd to his  
eyes

From their sight to be melting away in the skies  
That expanded around her.

## XIII.

There pass'd thro' his head  
A fancy — a vision. That woman was dead  
He had loved long ago — loved and lost ! dead to  
him,

Dead to all the life left him ; but there, in the  
dim

Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit ; 'twas hers ;  
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers,

' O soul, to its sources departing away !

' Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.

' I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,

' *One hope to my heart.* But in this parting hour

- ‘ I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.  
‘ Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,  
‘ Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart  
denies,  
‘ Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon  
skies,  
‘ This wild night is passing away while I speak :  
‘ I.o, above us, the dayspring beginning to break !  
‘ Something wakens within me, and warms to the  
beam.  
‘ Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream ?  
‘ I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark  
‘ Of a new light within me to solace the dark  
‘ Unto which I return ; or perchance it may be  
‘ The last spark of fires half extinguish’d in me.  
‘ I know not. Thou goest thy way : I my own :  
‘ For good or for evil, I know not. Alone  
‘ This I know : my heart softens. The ghosts of  
old years  
‘ Seem appeased for a moment. Just now I shed  
tears ;  
‘ And for those tears I thank thee. I should have  
sinn’d less,  
‘ Suffer’d less, if I could have wept more. I would  
bless  
‘ (I whose heart sought to curse thee !) — would  
bless thee, Lucile.  
‘ But what were my curse, or my blessing? I  
feel  
‘ This alone ; we are parting. I wish’d to say  
more.  
‘ But no matter ! ’twill pass. All between us is o’er.  
‘ Forget the wild words of to-night. ’Twas the  
pain  
‘ For long years hoarded up, that rush’d from me  
again.  
‘ I was unjust : forgive me. Spare now to reprove  
‘ *Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not  
love,*

- ‘ That you thwarted this night. What is done is  
now done.  
‘ Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.  
‘ I was madden’d, delirious! I saw you return  
‘ To him — not to me; and I felt my heart burn  
‘ With a fierce thirst for vengeance — and thus  
... let it pass!  
‘ Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments,  
alas!  
‘ Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose  
‘ ’Tis to meet never more. Is it not so? Who  
knows,  
‘ Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise  
flies?  
‘ Or what altars of his in the desert may rise?  
‘ Is it not so, Lucile? Well, well! Thus then we  
part  
‘ Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from  
heart!’

## XIV.

- And again, clearer far than the chime of the bell,  
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.  
‘ Our two paths must part us, Eugène; for my  
own  
‘ Seems no more through that world in which  
henceforth alone  
‘ You must work out (as now I believe that you  
will)  
‘ The hope which you speak of. That work I shall  
still  
‘ (If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far  
away.  
‘ Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if  
I say,  
‘ That the great mortal combat between human life  
‘ And each human soul must be single. The strife  
‘ None can share, tho’ by all its results may be  
known.

- ' When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth  
 alone.  
 ' I say not, indeed, we shall meet never more,  
 ' For I know not. But meet, as we have met of  
 yore,  
 ' I know that we cannot. Perchance we may  
 meet  
 ' By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the  
 street,  
 ' Or in solitude even, but never again  
 ' Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met,  
 Eugène.  
 ' For we know not the way we are going, nor yet  
 ' Where our two ways may meet, or may cross.  
 Life hath set  
 ' No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,  
 ' I will promise: whatever your path, or my own,  
 ' If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance  
 ' That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield,  
 and lance  
 ' Lost or shatter'd, borne down by the stress of the  
 war,  
 ' You falter and hesitate, if from afar  
 ' I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)  
 ' O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should  
 see  
 ' That my presence could rescue, support you, or  
 guide,  
 ' In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,  
 ' To warn, if you will, or incite, or control;  
 ' And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to  
 soul!'

## xv.

The voice ceased.

He uplifted his eyes.

All alone  
*He stood on the bare edge of dawn. She was  
 gone,*

Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,  
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of  
light.

And at once, in her place, was the Sunrise ! It  
rose

In its sumptuous splendour and solemn repose,  
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,  
Realms of rose, in the Orient ! And breathless,  
and bold,

While the great gates of heaven roll'd back one by  
one,

The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun !  
Thrice holy Eospheros ! Light's reign began  
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the  
man.

The dawn on the mountains ! the dawn every-  
where !

Light ! silence ! the fresh renovations of air !  
O earth, and O ether ! A butterfly breeze  
Floated up, flutter'd down, and poised blithe on  
the trees.

Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp rip-  
pled stream,

Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,  
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill slope,  
The spirits of morning were whispering '*Hope !*'

## XVI.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she  
stood

But a moment before, and where now roll'd the  
flood

Of the sunrise all golden, he seem'd to behold,  
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold  
Of his own golden youth. Such a youth as that  
night

He had painted it to her. There rose on his sight  
A vision of knightly forefathers, of fame,  
Of ancestral ambition ; and France by the name

Of his sires seem'd to call him. There, hover'd in  
light

That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright  
And Aureorean clouds, which themselves seem'd  
to be

Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he  
Had once dwelt, a native!

There, rooted and bound  
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it! Around  
The rims of the sunrise it hover'd and shone  
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone;  
And he — as the body may yearn for the soul,  
So he yearn'd to embody that image. His whole  
Heart arose to regain it.

‘ And is it too late ? ’

No! for Time is a fiction, and limits not fate.  
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.  
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to  
regain

The pure source of spirit, there is no TOO LATE.  
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate  
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him  
Arose to that image. The image waned dim  
Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt  
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt  
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense —  
awed, amazed —

Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

## CANTO VI.

## I.

MAN is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend  
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,  
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern  
          shocks

That have shatter'd creation, and shapen it, rocks,  
He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!  
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.  
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:  
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes: her solitudes  
          spread

To daunt him: her forces dispute his command:  
Her snows fall to freeze him: her suns burn to  
          brand:

Her seas yawn to engulf him: her rocks rise to  
          crush:

And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush  
On their startled Invader.

                                                          In lone Malabar,  
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and  
          far,

'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw  
(Striped and spotted destroyers!) he sees, pale  
          with awe,

On the menacing edge of a fiery sky  
Grim Doorga, blue-limb'd and red-handed, go by,  
And the first thing he worships is Terror.

                                                          Anon,  
Still impell'd by Necessity hungrily on,  
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,  
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.  
*From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul:*



Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll !  
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides  
    high on  
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion :  
And man, conquering Terror, is worshipp'd by  
    man.

A camp has this world been since first it began !  
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian ; at  
    peace,  
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece ;  
But, warring his way thro' a world's destinies,  
Lo from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise  
Domes of empiry, dower'd with science and art,  
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart !

New realms to man's soul have been conquer'd.  
    But those,  
Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes !  
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her  
    own,  
And bold must the man be that braves the Un-  
    known !

Not a truth has to art or to science been given,  
But brows have ached for it, and souls toil'd and  
    striven ;

And many have striven, and many have fail'd,  
And many died, slain by the truth they assail'd.  
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his  
    place

And dominion, behold ! he is brought face to face  
With a new foe — himself ! War is open'd within  
His own heart : for self-knowledge is knowledge of  
    sin.

And many have striven, and many in vain,  
With the still rebel heart, and the still baffled  
    brain ; —

*Some have conquer'd, some died of that conquest,  
    but all*

Have suffer'd, all struggled ; and, whether he fall  
Or whether he vanquish, still man, on the field  
Of life's lasting war, may not rest on his shield,  
May not lean on his spear, till the armèd Arch-  
angel  
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

Now 'tis Thought attacks Thought. And the  
dread battle-plain  
Of that war is the soul, now, herself. And again  
The Immortals take part in the battle ; and Heaven  
And Hell to the conflict their counsels have given.  
See ! stern Torquemada dooms Thought to expire !  
Hark ! the psalm of the martyr soars upward in fire !  
Then the auto-da-fés are extinguish'd : back roll  
Dense volumes of darkness : and, sovran, the soul  
Chants her pæan, proclaiming to Earth Heaven's  
freedom.

And who is it that comes with dyed garments from  
Edom ?

His foot in the blood of the winepress is wet,  
And that foot on the head of the serpent is set !

Oh were nought gain'd beside from this conflict of  
Thought,  
Man, at least, in alliance with man hath been  
brought.

The wide world owns no longer one master alone,  
And no more every nation is vassal to one.  
Now the strong need the weak, and the weak aid  
the strong ;

Gracious laws whereby Peace may her lifetime  
prolong

Have been wrought out of wrath by the swords of  
mankind,

And the shout of free nations rolls forth on the  
wind.

May the sword then be sheath'd ? may the banner  
be furl'd ?

And is Peace crown'd for ever, fair Queen of the  
World ?

Nay, Peace holds the sword to establish her state,  
And the sentinel walks by the white temple-gate,  
Lest the Lion, by night, to the Leopard should say,  
' Arise, Brother Leopard, and forth on the prey !'

Still the watchfire must burn, still the watchman  
must wake,

And still Force arm to keep what still Force arms  
to take.

What is worth living for is worth dying for too.

And therefore all honour, brave hearts ! unto you  
Who have fallen, that Freedom, more fair by your  
death,

A pilgrim, may walk where your blood on her  
path

Leads her steps to your graves !

Let them babble above you !

Sleep well ! where no breath of detraction may  
move you,

And the peace the world gives not is yours at the  
last !

Chiefly you, sons of England, whose life-blood hath  
past

Into England's own being ! or whether your names,  
'Mid the shrines of her kings, the pale tablet pro-  
claims ;

Or, recorded alone in some fond widow'd heart,  
Amidst Spain's arid vines, vex'd no more by the  
dart

Of the suns of the south, or on wide Waterloo,  
You now slumber ; or where the chill Baltic rolls  
blue ;

Or the crocus of Asia may brighten your bed ;

Or 'mid halls in the Orient, where latest you bled,

Where Horror still hears, up the pale marble floor,  
*Thro' curtains twice crimson'd, the drip of your  
gore.*

You, sons of one mother, who boast from your birth  
Of our England's fair name 'mid the nations of earth,  
You who — 'midst the grey castles the swords of our sires  
Have left us to fight for; the pastoral spires  
Where we breathed our first prayers; and our green lanes, so green !  
Where spring is thrice spring, and each maiden a queen —  
Love these things with a love that is threefold, because  
There a man may, unvex'd by iniquitous laws,  
Say the thing that he thinks, do the thing that he needs :  
There Thought may find freedom for all honest creeds;  
There Opinion may circle from soul on to soul;  
And Enterprise broadly embrace either pole;  
Forget not whose blood with its sanction hath seal'd  
This, our boast, upon many a far foughten field.  
What is worth living for is worth dying for too.  
Forget not the Dead who died for us !

And you  
Whom this song cannot reach with its transient breath,  
Deaf ears that are stopp'd with the brown dust of death,  
Blind eyes that are dark to your own deathless glory,  
Silenced hearts that are heedless to praise murmur'd o'er ye,  
Sleep deep ! sleep in peace ! sleep in memory ever !  
Wrapt, each soul in the deeds of its deathless endeavour,  
Till that great Final Peace shall be struck through the world ;  
*Till the stars be recall'd, and the firmament fur'd*

In the dawn of a daylight undying ; until  
 The signal of Sion be seen on the Hill  
 Of the Lord ; when the day of the battle is done,  
 And the conflict with Time by Eternity won !

Till then, while the ages roll onward, thro' war,  
 Toil, and strife, must roll with them this turbulent  
 star.

And man can no more exclude War, than he can  
 Exclude Sorrow ; for both are conditions of man,  
 And agents of God. Truth's supreme revelations  
 Come in sorrow to men, and in war come to na-  
 tions.

Then blow, blow the clarion ! and let the war roll !  
 And strike steel upon steel, and strike soul upon  
 soul,

If, in striking, we kindle keen flashes and bright  
 From the manhood in man, stricken thus into light.

## II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of  
 pleasure,

Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the  
 measure !

Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me  
 One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee  
 Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,  
 Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime  
 In the light of the aureole over her head,  
 Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh  
 and red.

Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold  
 The shrill clanging curtains of war !

And behold

A vision !

The antique Heraclean seats ;  
*And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those  
 fleets,*

*Which said to the winds, ' Be ye, too, Genoese !'*

And the red, angry sands of the chafed Chersone-  
 nese ;  
 And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied  
 Round the Armies of England and France, side by  
 side  
 Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast !)  
 Where the towers of the North fret the skies of  
 the East.

## III.

Since that sunrise, which rose thro' the calm linden  
 stems  
 O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden at Ems,  
 Thro' twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,  
 This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,  
 And the fates that I sing of have flow'd with the  
 fates  
 Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the  
 gates  
 Of that doom'd and heroical city, in which  
 (Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the  
 ditch !)  
 At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,  
 Whom the huntsmen have hemm'd round at last in  
 his lair.

## IV.

A fang'd, arid plain, sapp'd with underground fire,  
 Soak'd with snow, torn with shot, mash'd to one  
 gory mire !  
 There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,  
 While those two famish'd ogres — the Siege, the  
 Defence,  
 Face to face, thro' a vapour froze, dismal, and dun,  
 Glare, scenting the breath of each other.  
 The one  
 Double-bodied, two-headed — by separate ways  
 Winding, serpentwise, nearer ; the other, each  
 day's

*In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it  
bails*

Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and  
pain,  
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze  
chain  
Of those terrible siege-lines !  
No change to that toil  
Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous  
soil,  
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the  
maim'd,  
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claim'd  
By man or by nature.

## VII.

Time passes. The dumb  
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.  
And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the  
brave :  
And many a young heart has glutted the grave :  
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,  
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous  
in story.

## VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set : thro'  
the camp  
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,  
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,  
That seems searching for something it never can  
find.  
The midnight is turning : the lamp is nigh spent :  
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent  
Lies a young British officer who . . .

In this place,  
However, my Muse is compell'd to retrace  
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.  
The shock which had suddenly shatter'd at last  
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature  
Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature



The real man, conceal'd till that moment beneath  
All he yet had appear'd. From the gay broider'd  
sheath

Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so  
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summon'd forth by  
a blow.

And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.

The wife gain'd a husband, the husband a wife,  
In that home which, tho' humbled and narrow'd by  
fate,

Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their  
state,

But large their possessions.

Sir Ridley, forgiven  
By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven  
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek  
speech

The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from  
reach

Of the law, died abroad.

Cousin John, heart and hand,  
Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took  
his stand

By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and  
friend

Of the home he both shared and assured, to the  
end,

With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave mean-  
while

Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's  
faithful smile.

Late in life, he began life in earnest; and still,  
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,  
'Thro' long, and laborious, and difficult days,  
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,  
Work'd his way through the world; till at last he  
began,

(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims  
from man)

After years of unwitness'd, unwearied endeavour,  
Years impassion'd yet patient, to realize ever  
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion  
The reflex of powers in himself — that dominion  
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,  
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his  
youth

In his manhood renew'd, fame and fortune he won  
Working only for home, love, and duty.

One son  
Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,  
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank  
joy,

The darling of young soldier comrades, just  
glanced

Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it  
chanced

That a blight sharp and sudden was breath'd o'er  
the bloom

Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom  
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:  
No light cloud like those which, for June to  
dispel,

Captious April engenders; but deep as his own  
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known  
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.

When first a wild war-note thro' England was  
sent,

He, transferring without either token, or word,  
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,  
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,  
Had march'd forth, with eyes that saw death in the  
star

Whence others sought glory. Thus, fighting, he  
fell

On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can  
tell

By what miracle, breathing, tho' shatter'd, and  
borne

To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding,  
 and torn.  
 Where for long days and nights, with the wound  
 in his side,  
 He lay, dark.

## IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,  
 In the young heart was rankling : for there, of a  
 truth,  
 In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,  
 A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,  
 Lay ensheathed : and that love, ever fretting its  
 sheath,  
 The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore thro'  
 and thro'.  
 There are loves in man's life for which time can  
 renew  
 All that time may destroy. Lives there are, tho',  
 in love,  
 Which cling to one faith, and die with it ; nor  
 move,  
 Tho' earthquakes may shatter the shrine.  
 Whence or how  
 Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not  
 now.

## X.

Oh is it a phantom ? a dream of the night ?  
 A vision which fever hath fashion'd to sight ?  
 The wind, wailing ever, with motion uncertain  
 Sways sighingly there the drench'd tent's tatter'd  
 curtain,  
 To and fro, up and down.

But it is not the wind  
 That is lifting it now : and it is not the mind  
 That hath moulded that vision.

A pale woman enters,  
 As wan as the lamp's waning light, which con-  
 centres

Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and  
dimmer  
There, all in a slumbrous and shadowy glimmer,  
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,  
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.  
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands  
By his bedside, all silent. She lays her white  
hands  
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing  
Softly, softly, the sore wounds: the hot blood-  
stain'd dressing  
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals  
Thro' the rack'd weary frame: and, throughout it,  
he feels  
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighbourhood.  
Something smoothes the toss'd pillow. Beneath a  
grey hood  
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent  
o'er him,  
And thrill thro' and thro' him. The sweet form  
before him,  
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping!  
A soft voice says . . . 'Sleep!'  
And he sleeps: he is sleeping.

## XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there:  
Still that pale woman moves not. A minist'ring  
care  
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering  
The aspect of all things around him.  
Revering  
Some power unknown and benignant, he bless'd  
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest  
Having loosen'd the mind's tangled meshes, he  
faintly  
Sigh'd . . . 'Say what thou art, blessed dream of a  
saintly  
'And minist'ring spirit!'

A whisper serene  
 Slid, softer than silence . . . 'The Sœur Serene  
 'A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire  
 'Aught further, young soldier. The son  
     sire,  
 'For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the  
 'Thou didst not shun death: shun not life  
     more brave  
 'To live, than to die. Sleep!'  
     He sleeps: he is sl

## xii.

He waken'd again, when the dawn was just  
     ing  
 The skies with chill splendour. And there  
     fitting,  
 Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting  
 As the dawn to the darkness, so life seem'd  
     ing  
 Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lan  
     burning,  
 Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.

'If thou be of the living, and not of the dead  
 'Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing  
 'Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing  
 'Thy mission of mercy! whence art thou?'

'Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! O  
 'Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead  
 'To thee, and to others, alive yet' . . . she  
 'So long as there liveth the poor gift in me  
 'Of this ministration: to them, and to thee,  
 'Dead in all things beside. A French Nun  
     vocation  
 'Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no name  
 'Wherever man suffers, or woman may sorrow  
 'There her land! there her kindred!  
     She bent down to

The hot pillow; and added . . . 'Yet more than  
another

'Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy  
mother,

'I knew them — I know them.'

'Oh can it be? you!

'My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,

'You know them?'

She bow'd, half averting, her head  
In silence.

He brokenly, timidly said,

'Do they know I am thus?'

'Hush!' . . . she smiled, as she drew  
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be true?  
That beloved and familiar writing!

He burst  
Into tears . . . 'My poor mother — my father! the  
worst

'Will have reach'd them!'

'No, no!' she exclaim'd with a smile,

'They know you are living; they know that mean-  
while

'I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep  
not!'

But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot  
Fever'd brow of the boy weeping wildly is press'd.  
There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:  
And he hears, as it were between smiling and  
weeping,

The calm voice say . . . 'Sleep!'

And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

### XIII.

And day follow'd day. And, as wave follows wave,  
With the tide, day by day, life, re-issuing, drave  
Thro' that young hardy frame novel currents of  
health.

Yet some strange obstruction, which life's self by  
stealth

Seem'd to cherish, impeded life's progress. And  
still

A feebleness, less of the frame than the will,  
Clung about the sick man: hid and harbour'd  
within

The sad hollow eyes: pinch'd the cheek pale and  
thin:

And clothed the wan fingers with languor.

And there,  
Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,  
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,  
And so gentle of hand, sat the *Sœur Seraphine*!

## XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,  
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace  
Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the  
whole

Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent,  
the soul

Seem'd to fill with its own light, like some sunny  
fountain

Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain

That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,

And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.

So that, watching that face, you would scarce pause  
to guess

The years which its calm careworn lines might  
express,

Feeling only what suffering with these must have  
past

To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

## XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out  
His brief thrifty fire, and the wind was about,  
*The nun*, watchful still by the boy, on his own  
*Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone*  
*Of her voice moved the silence.*

She said . . . 'I have heal'd  
' These wounds of the body. Why hast thou conceal'd,

' Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?  
' Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?'

He winced, with a start,  
As of one that is suddenly touch'd on the spot  
From which every nerve derives suffering.

' What?  
' Lies my heart, then, so bare?' he moan'd bitterly.  
' Nay,'

With compassionate accents she hasten'd to say,  
' Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow,  
young man,

' So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan

' Her features, yet know them not?

' Oh, was it spoken,  
' "*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the  
broken!*"

' Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,

' When we leave the bruised heart, if we bind the  
bruised bone?

' Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?

' Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers, that  
we hold

' To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still

' To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill

' Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art

' Help'd of Heaven, to bind up the broken of  
heart.

' Trust to me!' (His two feeble hands in her own  
She drew gently.) ' Trust to me!' (she said, with  
soft tone):

' I am not so dead in remembrance to all

' I have died to in this world, but what I recall

' Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,

' To grieve for both — save from both haply! The  
dial

' Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.



' The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.  
 ' Life's sorrows still fluctuate : God's love does not.  
 ' And His love is unchanged, when it changes our  
   lot.  
 ' Looking up to this light, which is common to all,  
 ' And down to these shadows, on each side, that  
   fall  
 ' In Time's silent circle, so various for each,  
 ' Is it nothing to know that they never can reach  
 ' So far, but what light lies beyond them for ever ?  
 ' Trust to me ! Oh, if in this hour I endeavour  
 ' To trace the shade creeping across the young life  
 ' Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watch'd  
   through its strife  
 ' With the shadow of death, 'tis with this faith alone,  
 ' That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the  
   sun.  
 ' Trust to me ! '

She paused : he was weeping. Small need  
 Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,  
 Had those gentle accents to win from his pale  
 And parch'd, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief  
   tale  
 Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,  
 And in words few as may be shall straightway be  
   told.

## XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace  
 Was driven from Europe, a young girl — the niece  
 Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile  
 By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a  
   while  
 With a lady allied to her race — an old dame  
 Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,  
 In the Faubourg Saint Germain.

Upon that fair child,  
 From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.  
 One uncle their place in her life had supplied,

And their place in her heart : she had grown at his  
side,  
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,  
From childhood to girlhood.

This fair orphan ward

Seem'd the sole human creature that lived in the  
heart

Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could im-  
part :

One ray of response to the eyes which, above  
Her fair infant forehead, look'd down with a love  
That seem'd almost stern, so intense was its chill  
Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill  
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the courtyard ; the chambers were  
bare

In that ancient mansion ; when first the stern tread  
Of its owner awaken'd their echoes long dead :  
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a  
brother),

Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother  
Had placed on his bosom. 'Twas said — right or  
wrong —

That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,  
To which, as a stranger, its lord now return'd,  
In years yet recall'd, through loud midnights had  
burn'd

The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,  
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wander'd  
through

Those desolate chambers ; and calm and severe  
Was the life of their inmate.

Men now saw appear

Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,  
Which seem'd to lock up in a cold iron case  
Tears harden'd to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,  
His severity seem'd to be trebly severe  
*In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,*

Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,  
 Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.  
 The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,  
 And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.  
 Yet he seem'd in the midst of his good deeds to  
 stand

A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.  
 There appear'd some inscrutable flaw in the plan  
 Of his life, that love fail'd to pass over.

That child  
 Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him;  
 smiled

To his frown, and dispell'd it.

The sweet sportive elf  
 Seem'd the type of some joy lost, and miss'd, in  
 himself.

Ever welcome he suffer'd her glad face to glide  
 In on hours when to others his door was denied:  
 And many a time with a mute moody look  
 He would watch her at prattle and play, like a  
 brook

Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,  
 But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had pass'd o'er that childhood before  
 A change came among them. A letter, which bore  
 Sudden consequence with it, one morning was  
 placed

In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced  
 To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone  
 After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.  
 Weeks pass'd. When he came back again he re-  
 turn'd

With a tall ancient dame from whose lips the child  
 learn'd

That they were of the same race and name. With  
 a face

*Sad and anxious, to this wither'd stock of the race  
 He confided the orphan, and left them alone*

In the old lonely house.

In a few days 'twas known,  
To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one  
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on  
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,  
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance  
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watch-  
word

And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his  
sword

For a Fatherland father'd no more (such is fate!)  
By legitimate parents.

And meanwhile, elate  
And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,  
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away:—  
'To the life of inaction farewell! After all,  
'Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,  
- 'But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,  
'In whatever makes death noble, life strong and  
pure.

'Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in —  
the lance

'Of the Arab to follow! I go! *Vive la France!*'

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as  
years fled,

'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women  
led

Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child  
grew

Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through  
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees  
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees

In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,

And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,

With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light  
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!

Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . 'Let  
Constance

‘Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France  
 ‘I may be ere the close of the year. I confide  
 ‘My life’s treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,  
 ‘The world which we live in.’

To Paris then came  
 Constànce to abide with that old stately dame  
 In that old stately Faubourg.

The young Englishman  
 Thus met her. ‘Twas there their acquaintance  
                     began,  
 There it closed. That old miracle — Love-at-first-  
                     sight —

Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright  
 Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden  
 Nor check’d, the young soldier was graciously  
                     bidden

An habitual guest to that house by the dame.  
 His own candid graces, the world-honour’d name  
 Of his father (in him not dishonour’d) were both  
 Fair titles to favour. His love, nothing loth,  
 The old lady observed, was return’d by Constànce.  
 And as the child’s uncle his absence from France  
 Yet prolong’d, she (thus easing long self-gratula-  
                     tion)

Wrote to him a lengthen’d and moving narration  
 Of the graces and gifts of the young English  
                     wooer :

His father’s fair fame ; the boy’s deference to her ;  
 His love for Constànce, — unaffected, sincere ;  
 And the girl’s love for him, read by her in those  
                     clear

timid eyes ; then the pleasure with which she  
 With a ~~ta~~waited

learn’d approval of all she had stated.

That they were

a face at cousin an answer there came,  
*Sad and anxious, to as stunn’d and astonish’d the*  
*He confided the orpha*

‘Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day  
‘You receive this. Until my return she may stay  
‘At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever  
‘To behold me again, understand, she will never  
‘Wed that man.

‘You have broken faith with me. Farewell!’

No appeal from that sentence.

It needs not to tell  
The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover:  
The dream they had laid out their lives in was  
over.

Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the  
face  
Of a life, where invisible hands seem’d to trace  
O’er the threshold, these words . . . ‘Hope no  
more!’

Unreturn’d  
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would  
have spurn’d

That weakness which suffers a woman to lie  
At the roots of man’s life, like a canker, and dry  
And wither the sap of life’s purpose. But there  
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare  
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not  
alone?

Recording a love that drew sorrow upon  
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek  
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,  
Beat him down, and destroy’d him?

News reach’d him indeed,  
Thro’ a comrade, who brought him a letter to  
read

From the lady whom Constance had lived with  
(’twas one

To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,  
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which  
said

That Constance, tho' never a murmur betray'd  
 What she suffer'd, in silence grew paler each day,  
 And seem'd visibly drooping and dying away.  
 It was then he sought death.

## XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'Twas told  
 With such broken, passionate words, as unfold  
 In glimpses alone, a coil'd grief. Thro' each pause  
 Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,  
 The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,  
 And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-  
 roof

At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,  
 The sick man, exhausted, droop'd backward his  
 head,  
 And fell into a feverish slumber.

Long while  
 Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The  
 still smile

That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face  
 And make it like heaven, was fled from its place  
 In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there  
 Seem'd to darken the lines of long sorrow and  
 care,

As low to herself she sigh'd . . .

'Hath it, Eugène,  
 'Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet,  
 all in vain!

'Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a  
 man,

'And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all  
 I can?

'Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!

'And then — soul of mine, whither? whither?'

## XVIII.

Large, slow,  
*Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.*

'Here, at least, I have fail'd not' . . . she mused  
. . . 'this is well !'

She drew from her bosom two letters.

In one,  
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,  
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.  
'The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile !  
'The hope of a home saved by thee — of a heart  
'Which hath never since then (thrice endear'd as  
thou art !)  
'Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save ! . . .  
save my son !  
'And if not' . . . the letter went brokenly on,  
'Heaven help us !'

Then follow'd, from Alfred, a few  
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,  
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,  
So unlike his own : how in beauty and truth  
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave :  
And how he had striven his son's youth to save  
From the errors so sadly redeem'd in his own,  
And so deeply repented : how thus, in that son,  
In whose youth he had garner'd his age, he had  
seem'd

To be bless'd by a pledge that the past was re-  
deem'd,

And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak  
Of the boy's baffled love ; in which fate seem'd to  
break

Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,  
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back  
again

The hopes of the future. To sue for consent  
Pride forbade : and the hope his old foe might  
relent

Experience rejected . . . 'My life for the boy's !'  
(He exclaim'd) ; 'for I die with my son, if he dies !  
'Lucile ! Heaven bless you for all you have done !  
'Save him, save him, Lucile ! save my son ! save  
my son !'



## XIX.

'Ay!' murmur'd the Sœur Seraphine . . . 'heart  
to heart!

'There, at least, I have fail'd not! Fulfill'd is my  
part?

'Accomplish'd my mission? One act crowns the  
whole.

'Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to  
soul!'

She knelt down, and pray'd. Still the boy slum-  
ber'd on.

Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was  
gone.

## XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent  
O'er the daily reports, in his well-order'd tent  
There sits a French General — bronzed by the  
sun

And sear'd by the sands of Algeria. One  
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee  
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be  
The idol and darling, the dream and the star  
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,  
And wary in council. He enter'd, indeed,  
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)  
The Army of France: and had risen, in part  
From a singular aptitude proved for the art  
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,  
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies  
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;  
Partly, too, from a name and position which  
France

Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,  
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,  
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,  
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won  
With many a wound, trench'd in many a scar,  
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

## XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to  
bear

Smiling token of provident order and care.

All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands  
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing  
bands.

In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,  
The messengers come, and the messengers go,  
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil :  
To report how the sapper contends with the soil  
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring  
In the hospital tent : and, combining, comparing,  
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,  
Moving all.

He is bending his brow o'er some plan  
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.  
The officer standing beside him is fain  
To refer to the angel solicitous cares  
Of the Sisters of Charity : one he declares  
To be known thro' the camp as a seraph of grace :  
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each  
place  
Where suffering is seen, silent, active — the  
Sœur . . .  
Sœur . . . how do they call her ?

‘ Ay, truly, of her  
‘ I have heard much,’ the General, musing, replies ;  
‘ And we owe her already (unless rumour lies)  
‘ The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean . . .  
‘ Ay, how do they call her ? . . . the Sœur —  
Seraphine  
‘ (Is it not so ?). I rarely forget names once  
heard.’

‘ Yes ; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant.’  
‘ On my word,

'I have much wish'd to see her. I fancy I trace,  
'In some facts traced to her, something more than  
the grace

'Of an angel : I mean an acute human mind,  
'Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find,  
'And, if possible, let her come to me. We shall,  
'I think, aid each other.'

'*Oui, mon Général ;*

'I believe she has lately obtain'd the permission  
'To tend some sick man in the Second Division  
'Of our Ally : they say a relation.'

'Ay, so ?

'A relation ?'

'Tis said so.'

'The name do you know ?'

'*Non, mon Général.*'

While they spoke yet there went  
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.

'A Sister of Charity craves, in a case  
'Of urgent and serious importance, the grace  
'Of brief private speech with the General there.  
'Will the General speak with her ?'

'Bid her declare

'Her mission.'

She will not. She craves to be seen  
And be heard.

Well, her name then.

The Sœur Seraphine.

*The Sœur Seraphine ! Strange ! On parle du  
soleil,*

*Et en voici les rayons ! Dépêche, Colonel !*

Clear the tent. She may enter.

#### xxii.

The tent has been clear'd.  
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,  
A sable long silver'd : and press'd down his brow  
On his hand, heavily. All his countenance, now  
Unwitness'd, at once fell dejected, and dreary,

As a curtain let fall by a hand that's grown weary,  
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepress'd,  
Steals th' impatient quick sigh, which reveals in  
man's breast

A conflict conceal'd, and experience at strife  
With itself, — the vex'd heart's passing protest on  
life.

He turn'd to his papers. He heard the light tread  
Of a faint foot behind him : and, lifting his head,  
Said, ' Sit, Holy Sister ! your worth is well known  
' To the hearts of our soldiers ; nor less to my own.  
' I have much wish'd to see you. I owe you some  
thanks :

' In the name of all those you have saved to our  
ranks

' I record them. Sit ! Now then, your mission ? '

The nun

Paused silent. The General eyed her anon  
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A  
change

Darken'd over his features. He mutter'd . . .

' Strange ! strange !

' Any face should so strongly remind me of *her* !

' Fool ! again the delirium, the dream ! does it stir ?

' Does it move as of old ? Psha !

' Sit, Sister ! I wait

' Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State

' The cause why you seek me ? '

' The cause ? ay, the cause ! '

She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —

As one who, awaked unawares, would put back

The sleep that for ever returns in the track

Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not  
the less

Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their  
stress,

Like doves to a penthouse, — a movement she made,

Less toward him than away from herself ; droop'd  
her head

And folded her hands on her bosom : long, spare,  
Fatigued, mournful hands ! Not a stream of stray  
hair

Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the face

Which they bound and lock'd up in a rigid white  
case.

She fix'd her eyes on him. There crept a vague  
awe

O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.

‘Eugène de Luvois,  
‘The cause which recalls me again to your side,  
‘Is a promise that rests unfulfill’d,’ she replied.  
‘I come to fulfil it.’

He sprang from the place  
Where he sat, press'd his hand, as in doubt, o'er  
his face :

And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground  
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the  
sound

Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight  
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would  
    'light

Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand  
laid

On her shoulder in silence ; bent o'er her his head,  
Search'd her face with a long look of troubled ap-  
peal

Against doubt ; stagger'd backward, and murmur'd  
... ' Lucile !

'Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . 'thus!

‘ Soul to soul, ay, Eugène,  
‘ As I pledged you my word that we should meet  
again.

‘Dead, . . .’ she murmur’d, ‘long dead ! all that  
lived in our lives —

'Thine and mine — saving that which ev'n life's  
self survives.

'The soul! 'Tis my soul seeks thine own. What  
may reach

‘ From my life to thy life (so wide each from each !)  
 ‘ Save the soul to the soul ? To thy soul I would  
     speak.

‘ May I do so ? ’

    He said (work’d and white was his cheek  
 As he raised it), ‘ Speak to me ! ’

    Deep, tender, serene,  
 And sad was the gaze which the Sœur Seraphine  
 Held on him. She spoke.

## XXIII.

    As some minstrel may fling,  
 Preluding the music yet mute in each string,  
 A swift hand athwart the hush’d heart of the whole,  
 Seeking which note most fitly may first move the  
     soul ;

And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,  
 Move pathetic in numbers remote ; — even so  
 The voice which was moving the heart of that man  
 Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,  
 Far away in the pathos remote of the past ;  
 Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,  
 Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that  
     were gone  
 Unaccomplish’d from life.

    He was mute.

## XXIV.

    She went on.  
 And still further down the dim past did she lead  
 Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed  
 ‘ Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,  
 And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flower’d  
     slope  
 Of life’s dawning land !

    ‘Tis the heart of a boy,  
 With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy !  
 The unproved desire — the unaim’d aspiration —  
 The deep, conscious life that forestalls consumma-  
     tion ;

Of the spirit which troubl'd  
With the birth of the palm-tree ! Let us  
The glorious creature ! The ages lie shut  
(Safe, see !) in the seed, at Time's signal to put  
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer  
on layer,  
Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands broad in  
blue air.  
So the palm in the palm-seed ! so, slowly — so,  
wrought  
Year by year unperceived, hope on hope, thought  
by thought,  
Trace the growth of the man from its germ in the  
boy.  
Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also destroy !  
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some chance in-  
tervene !  
While the leaf's in the bud, while the stem's in the  
green,  
A light bird bends the branch, a light breeze  
breaks the bough,  
Which, if spared by the light breeze, the light bird,  
may grow  
To baffle the tempest, and rock the high nest,  
And take both the bird and the breeze to its  
breast.  
Shall we save a whole forest in sparing one seed ?  
Save the man in the boy ? in the thought save the  
deed ?  
Let the whirlwind uproot the grown tree, if it can !  
Save the seed from the north wind. So let the  
grown man  
Face out fate. Spare the man-seed in youth.  
He was dumb

*She went one step further.*

## XXV.

Lo ! manhood is come.  
And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown to the  
tree,  
And the whirlwind comes after. Now prove we  
and see :  
What shade from the leaf ? what support from the  
branch ?  
Spreads the leaf broad and fair ? holds the bough  
strong and stanch ?  
There, he saw himself — dark, as he stood on that  
night,  
The last when they met and they parted : a sight  
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to rejoice !  
An ineffable tenderness troubled her voice ;  
It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.

Then he said  
(Never looking at her, never lifting his head,  
As though, at his feet, there lay visibly hurl'd  
'Those fragments), 'It was not a love, 'twas a  
world,  
' 'Twas a life, that lay ruin'd, Lucile !'

## XXVI.

She went on,  
' So be it ! Perish Babel, arise Babylon !  
' From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,  
' And to build up the future heaven shatters the  
past.'  
' Ay,' he moodily murmur'd, ' and who cares to  
scan  
' The heart's perish'd world, if the world gains a  
man ?  
' From the past to the present, tho' late, I appeal ;  
' To the nun Seraphine, from the woman Lucile !'



## XXVII.

Lucile! . . . the old name — the old self! silenced  
long:

Heard once more! felt once more!

As some soul to the throng  
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized  
By death to a new name and nature — surprised  
Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears faintly, and far,  
Some voice from the earth, left below a dim star,  
Calling to her forlornly; and (sadd'ning the psalms  
Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise palms!)  
The name borne 'mid earthly beloveds on earth  
Sigh'd above some lone grave in the land of her  
birth; —

So that one word . . . Lucile! . . . stirr'd the Sœur  
Seraphine,

For a moment. Anon she resumed her serene  
And concentrated calm.

'Let the Nun, then, retrace  
'The life of the soldier!' . . . she said, with a face  
That glow'd, gladdening her words.

'To the Present I come:  
'Leave the Past!'

There her voice rose, and seem'd as when some  
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple the praise  
Of the hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.  
Step by step did she follow his path from the place  
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year  
did she trace

(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's, existence.  
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance;  
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours:  
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers  
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same  
strife,

*Waged alike to the limits of each human life.  
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,  
Shut up in his lone moody halls: every word*

Held the weight of a tear : she recorded the good  
He had patiently wrought thro' a whole neighbour-  
hood ;

And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,  
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's  
door.

There she paused : and her accents seem'd dipp'd  
in the hue

Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew  
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's  
wages,

Yet working love's work ; reading backwards life's  
pages

For penance ; and stubbornly, many a time,  
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.

Then she spoke of the soldier ! . . . the man's work  
and fame,

The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim !  
Life's inward approval !

## XXVIII.

Her voice reach'd his heart,  
And sank lower. She spoke of herself : how, apart  
And unseen, — far away, — she had watch'd, year  
by year,

With how many a blessing, how many a tear,  
And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife :  
Guess'd the thought in the deed : traced the love  
in the life :

Bless'd the man in the man's work !

' *Thy* work . . . oh not mine !  
' Thine, Lucile !' . . . he exclaim'd . . . ' all the  
worth of it thine,  
' If worth there be in it !'

Her answer convey'd  
His reward, and her own : joy that cannot be said  
Alone by the voice . . . eyes—face—spoke silently :  
All the woman, one grateful emotion \

And she

A poor Sister of Charity ! hers a life spent  
In one silent effort for others ! . . .

She bent

Her divine face above him, and fill'd up his heart  
With the look that glow'd from it.

Then slow, with soft art,

Fix'd her aim, and moved to it.

## XXIX.

He, the soldier humane,

He, the hero ; whose heart hid in glory the pain  
Of a youth disappointed ; whose life had made  
known

The value of man's life ! . . . that youth over-  
thrown

And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth  
In another ? his own life of strenuous truth  
Accomplish'd in act, had it taught him no care  
For the life of another ? . . . oh no ! everywhere  
In the camp, which she moved thro', she came face  
to face

With some noble token, some generous trace  
Of his active humanity . . .

‘ Well,’ he replied,

‘ If it be so ?’

‘ I come from the solemn bedside

‘ Of a man that is dying,’ she said. ‘ While we  
speak,

‘ A life is in jeopardy.’

‘ Quick then ! you seek

‘ Aid, or medicine, or what ?’

‘ ’Tis not needed,’ she sai

‘ Medicine ? yes, for the mind ! ’Tis a heart th  
needs aid !

‘ You, Eugène de Luvois, you (and you only) c  
‘ Save the life of this man. Will you save it ?’

‘ What m

‘ How ? . . . where ? . . . can you ask ?’

She went rapid

To her object in brief vivid words. . . . The young  
son

Of Matilda and Alfred — the boy lying there  
Half a mile from that tent door — the father's  
despair,

The mother's deep anguish — the pride of the boy  
In the father — the father's one hope and one joy  
In the son : — the son now — wounded, dying ! She  
told

Of the father's stern struggle with life : the boy's  
bold,

Pure, and beautiful nature : the fair life before him  
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might  
restore him !

The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugène :  
Its pathos : the girl's love for him : how, half slain  
In his tent she had found him ; won from him the  
tale ;

Sought to nurse back his life ; found her efforts still  
fail ;

Beaten back by a love that was stronger than  
life ;

Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife  
Wherein England and France in their best blood,  
at last,

Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the  
past.

And shall nations be nobler than men ? Are not  
great

Men the models of nations ? For what is a state  
But the many's confused imitation of one ?

Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son  
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance  
An innocent life,—here, when England and France  
Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,  
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent  
gore ?

*She went on to tell how the boy had clung still  
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until*

From his weak hands the strong effort dropp'd,  
stricken down

By the news that the heart of Constance, like his  
own,

Was breaking beneath . . .

But there 'Hold!' he exclaim'd,  
Interrupting, 'forbear!' . . . his whole face was  
inflamed

With the heart's swarthy thunder which yet, while  
she spoke,

Had been gathering silent—at last the storm broke  
In grief or in wrath. . . .

'Tis to him, then,' he cried, . . .  
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,

'That I owe these late greetings—for him you are  
here—

'For his sake you seek me—for him, it is clear,  
'You have deign'd at the last to bethink you again  
'Of this long forgotten existence!'

'Eugène!'

'Ha! fool that I was!' . . . he went on, . . . 'and  
just now

'While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to  
grow

'Almost boyish again, almost sure of *one* friend!

'Yet this was the meaning of all—this the end!

'Be it so! There's a sort of slow justice (admit!)

'In this—that the word that man's finger hath  
writ

'In fire on my heart, I return him at last.

'Let him learn that word—Never!'

'Ah, still to the past

'Must the present be vassal?' she said. 'In the  
hour

'We last parted I urged you to put forth the power

'Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.

'Yours, the promise to strive: mine,—to watch  
o'er the strife.

'I foresaw you would conquer; you have conquer'd  
much,

‘ Much, indeed, that is noble ! I hail it as such,  
‘ And am here to record and applaud it. I saw  
‘ Not the less in your nature, Eugène de Luvois,  
‘ One peril — one point where I fear’d you would  
fail  
‘ To subdue that worst foe which a man can as-  
sail, —  
‘ Himself : and I promised that, if I should see  
‘ My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,  
‘ That moment would bring me again to his side.  
‘ That moment is come ! for that peril was pride,  
‘ And you falter. I plead for yourself, and one  
other,  
‘ For that gentle child without father or mother  
‘ To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of  
France,  
‘ For your own nobler nature — and plead for  
Constance !’

At the sound of that name he averted his head.

‘ Constance ! . . . . Ay, she enter’d my lone life’  
(he said)  
‘ When its sun was long set ; and hung over its  
night  
‘ Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,  
‘ In the midst of much darkness ! Who names me  
but she  
‘ With titles of love ? and what rests there for me  
‘ In the silence of age save the voice of that  
child ?  
‘ The child of my own better life, undefiled !  
‘ My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts !’  
‘ Say,’

Said Lucile, solemnly — ‘ are you able to lay  
‘ Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man  
‘ And swear that, whatever may happen, you can  
‘ Feel assured for the life you thus cherish ?’

‘ How so ?’

She look’d up. ‘ If the boy should die thus ?’

‘ Yes, I know

‘What your look would imply . . . this sleek  
stranger forsooth!

‘Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth

‘The heart of my niece must break for it!’

She cried,

‘Nay, but hear me yet further!’

With slow heavy stride,

Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,

He was muttering low to himself as he went.

‘Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just  
so long

‘As their wings are in growing; and when these  
are strong

‘They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!’ . . .

The nun

Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmur’d, ‘The  
sun

‘Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! oh,  
yet

‘Let this day upon one final victory set,

‘And complete a life’s conquest!’

He said, ‘Understand!

‘If Constànce wed the son of this man, by whose  
hand

‘My heart hath been robb’d, she is lost to my life!

‘Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the  
wife

‘Of that man’s son the child of my age? At her  
side

‘Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the  
bride

‘Of . . . enough!

‘Ah, and you immemorial halls

‘Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet  
falls

‘On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,

‘Present, — all, in one silence! old trees to the  
blast

‘Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,

- ‘ Never more, never more in the wild bosky ways  
‘ Shall I hear thro’ your umbrage ancestral the  
    wind  
‘ Prophecy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind  
‘ Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far  
    years  
‘ Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with  
    tears !  
‘ Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone  
‘ Rouse your echoes ?’  
    ‘ O think not,’ she said, ‘ of the son  
‘ Of the man whom unjustly you hate ! only think  
‘ Of this young human creature, that cries from the  
    brink  
‘ Of a grave to your mercy !  
    ‘ Recall your own words  
‘ (Words my memory mournfully ever records !)  
‘ How with love may be wreck’d a whole life ! then,  
    Eugène,  
‘ Look with me (still those words in our ears !) once  
    again  
‘ At this young soldier sinking from life here —  
    dragg’d down  
‘ By the weight of the love in his heart: no re-  
    nown,  
‘ No fame comforts *him* ! nations shout not above  
‘ The lone grave down to which he is bearing the  
    love  
‘ Which life has rejected ! Will *you* stand apart ?  
‘ You, with such a love’s memory deep in your  
    heart !  
‘ You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led  
    on  
‘ Thro’ the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it  
    hath won,  
‘ By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,  
‘ Such as lies at your door now : who have but, in  
    truth,  
‘ To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,



‘ And by that word you rescue a life ! ’

He was stirr’d.

Still he sought to put from him the cup ; bow’d his  
face

On his hand ; and anon, as tho’ wishing to chase  
With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,  
He sprang up, brush’d past her, and bitterly cried  
‘ No ! — Constance a Vargrave ! — I cannot con-  
sent ! ’

Then up rose the Sœur Seraphine.

The low tent,

In her sudden uprising, seem’d dwarf’d by the  
height

From which those imperial eyes pour’d the light  
Of their deep silent sadness upon him.

No wonder

He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under  
The compulsion of that grave regard ! For between  
The Duc de Luvois and the Sœur Seraphine  
At that moment there rose all the height of one  
soul

O’er another ; she look’d down on him from the  
whole

Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and  
days,

There were long months and years in that heart-  
searching gaze ;

And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos  
thrill’d thro’

And transfix’d him.

‘ Eugène de Luvois, but for you,

‘ I might have been now — not this wandering nun,

‘ But a mother, a wife — pleading, not for the son

‘ Of another, but blessing some child of my own,

‘ His, — the man’s that I once loved ! . . . Hush !  
that which is done

‘ I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That’s  
best

‘ Which God sends. ’Twas His will : it is mine.  
And the rest

‘ Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads  
 ‘ In your heart — He that judges of all thoughts  
 and deeds,

‘ With eyes, mine forestall not ! This only I say :  
 ‘ You have not the right (read it, you, as you  
 may !)

‘ To say . . . “ I am the wrong’d.” ’ . . .

‘ Have I wrong’d thee ? — wrong’d *thee* !’  
 He falter’d, ‘ Lucile, ah, Lucile !’

‘ Nay, not me,’  
 She murmur’d, ‘ but man ! The lone nun standing  
 here

‘ Has no claim upon earth, and is pass’d from the  
 sphere

‘ Of earth’s wrongs and earth’s reparations. But  
 she,

‘ The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in  
 me,

‘ Demands from her grave reparation to man,

‘ Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you  
 can

‘ This voice from the grave !’

‘ Hush !’ he moan’d, ‘ I obey  
 ‘ The Sœur Seraphine. There, Lucile ! let this  
 pay

‘ Every debt that is due to that grave. Now lead  
 on :

‘ I follow you, Sœur Seraphine ! . . . To the son

‘ Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then,’ . . .

As he spoke  
 He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke  
 Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries crown’d,  
 Of the city beneath them . . .

‘ Then, *there*, underground,  
 ‘ And *valete et plaudite*, soon as may be !

‘ Let the old tree go down to the earth — the old  
 tree,

‘ With the worm at its heart ! Lay the axe to the  
 root !

- ‘ Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young  
shoot ?  
‘ A Vargrave ! . . . this pays all . . . . Lead on ! . . .  
In the seed  
‘ Save the forest ! . . .  
‘ I follow . . . forth, forth ! where you lead.’

## XXX.

The day was declining ; a day sick and damp.  
In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly  
camp  
Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent  
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent  
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting  
Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely  
flitting,  
Cross’d the silence between him and death, which  
seem’d near.  
— ‘ Pain o’er-reaches itself, so is baulk’d ! else, how  
bear  
‘ This intense and intolerable solitude,  
‘ With its eye on my heart and its hand on my  
blood ?  
‘ Pulse by pulse ! Day goes down : yet she comes  
not again.  
‘ Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more  
plain,  
‘ Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange ! and scarcely  
feel sad.  
‘ Oh, to think of *Constance thus*, and not to go mad !  
‘ But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his  
own  
‘ Dull doings . . .’

## XXXI.

Between those sick eyes and the sun  
*A shadow fell thwart.*

## XXXII.

'Tis the pale nun once more !  
But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the  
door ?  
How oft had he watch'd through the glory and  
gloom  
Of the battle, with long, longing looks that dim  
plume  
Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook,  
stoop'd  
To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was loop'd !  
How that stern face had haunted and hover'd  
about  
The dreams it still scared ! through what fond fear  
and doubt  
Had the boy yearn'd in heart to the hero ! (What's  
like  
A boy's love for some famous man ?) . . . Oh, to  
strike  
A wild path through the battle, down striking per-  
chance  
Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of  
France,  
And so fall in his glorious regard ! . . . Oft, how  
oft  
Had his heart flash'd this hope out, whilst watching  
aloft  
The dim battle that plume dance and dart — never  
seen  
So near till this moment ! how eager to glean  
Every stray word, dropp'd through the camp-babble  
in praise  
Of his hero — each tale of old venturous days  
In the desert ! And now . . . could he speak out  
his heart  
Face to face with that man ere he died !

## XXXIII.

With a start

The sick soldier sprang up: the blood sprang up in  
 him,  
 To his throat, and o'erthrew him: he reel'd back:  
 a dim  
 Sanguine haze fill'd his eyes; in his ears rose the  
 din  
 And rush, as of cataracts loosen'd within,  
 Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale  
 nun  
 (Looking larger than life, where she stood in the  
 sun)  
 Point to him and murmur, 'Behold!' Then that  
 plume  
 Seem'd to wave like a fire, and fade off in the  
 gloom  
 Which momentarily put out the world.

## XXXIV.

To his side

Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . .  
 'Ah!' . . . he sigh'd,  
 'The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and  
 those eyes,  
 'All the mother's! The old things again!  
 'Do not rise.  
 'You suffer, young man?'

THE BOY.

Sir, I die.

THE DUKE.

Not so young!

THE BOY.

*So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among.*

The fray'd warp and woof of this brief life of  
mine  
Other lives than my own. Could my death but  
untwine  
That vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke,  
young — so young !  
And I knew you not ? yet I have done you a  
wrong  
Irreparable ! . . . late, too late to repair.  
If I knew any means . . . but I know none ! . . . I  
swear,  
If this broken fraction of time could extend  
Into infinite lives of atonement, no end  
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that  
be !)  
To include it ! Not too late, however, for me  
To entreat : is it too late for you to forgive ?

THE DUKE.

Your wrong — my forgiveness — explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live !  
Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,  
I falter ! . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think  
Should free my soul hence.  
Ah ! you could not surmise  
That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, long-  
ing eyes  
Were following you evermore (heeded not !)  
While the battle was flowing between us : nor  
what  
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went  
With the wind and the rain, round and round your  
blind tent,  
Persistant and wild as the wind and the rain,  
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain !  
Oh, how obdurate then look'd your tent ! The  
waste air

Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . ' Off! he  
is there !'

I know not what merciful mystery now  
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see  
lying low

Other footsteps (not those !) must soon bear to the  
grave.

But death is at hand, and the few words I have  
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once.

Duke, I swear,  
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to  
hear!)

That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de  
Luvois,

I loved your niece — loved ? why, I *love* her ! I  
saw,

And, seeing, how could I but love her ? I  
seem'd

Born to love her. Alas, were that all ! Had I  
dream'd

Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now  
Ever fearfully present before me, I vow

That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the  
tomb

Into which I descend . . . Oh why, whilst there was  
room

In life left for warning, had no one the heart  
To warn me ? Had any one whisper'd . . . ' De-  
part !'

To the hope the whole world seem'd in league then  
to nurse !

Had any one hinted . . . ' Beware of the curse  
' Which is coming !' There was not a voice raised  
to tell,

Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it  
fell,

*And then . . . then the blow fell on both ! This is  
why*

*I implore you to pardon that great injury*

Wrought on her, and, thro' her, wrought on you,  
          heaven knows  
How unwittingly !

THE DUKE.

Ah ! . . and, young soldier, suppose  
That I came here to seek, not grant, pardon ? —

THE BOY.

Of whom ?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb  
No boyish resentment ; not one lonely thought  
That honours you not. In all this there is nought  
'Tis for me to forgive.

Every glorious act  
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,  
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in your  
          own.

And have I not hoarded, to ponder upon,  
A hundred great acts from your life ? Nay, all  
          these,

Were they so many lying and false witnesses,  
Does there rest not *one* voice which was never un-  
          true ?

I believe in *Constance*, Duke, as she does in you !  
In this great world around us, wherever we turn,  
Some grief irremediable we discern :  
And yet — there sits God, calm in Heaven above !  
Do we trust one whit less in his justice or love ?  
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough ! Hear at last, then, the truth.  
*Your father and I* — foes we were in our youth.



It matters not why. Yet thus much understand :  
 The hope of my youth was signed out by his hand.  
 I was not of those whom the buffets of fate  
 Tame and teach : and my heart buried slain love  
                   in hate.

If your own frank young heart, yet unconscious of  
                   all

Which turns the heart's blood in its springtide to  
                   gall,

And unable to guess even aught that the furrow  
 Across these grey brows hides of sin or of sorrow  
 Comprehends not the evil and grief of my life,  
 'Twill at least comprehend how intense was the  
                   strife

Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby  
 I seek in the son of my youth's enemy  
 The friend of my age. Let the present release  
 Here acquitted the past ! In the name of my  
                   niece,

Whom for my life in yours as a hostage I give,  
 Are you great enough, boy, to forgive me, — and  
                   live ?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy  
 Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face of the boy  
 As when some stormy moon, in a long cloud con-  
                   fined,

Struggles outward thro' shadows, the varying wind  
 Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised, from her  
                   prison,

So that slow joy grew clear in his face. He had  
                   risen

To answer the Duke ; but strength fail'd every  
                   limb ;

A strange happy feebleness trembled thro' him.  
 With a faint cry of rapturous wonder, he sank  
 On the breast of the nun, who stood near.

‘ Yes, boy ! thank

‘ *This guardian angel,*’ the Duke said. ‘ I — you

' We owe all to her. Crown her work. Live ! be true

' To your young life's fair promise, and live for her sake !'

' Yes, Duke : I will live. I *must* live — live to make

' My whole life the answer you claim,' the boy said,

' For joy does not kill !'

Back again the faint head  
Declined on the nun's gentle bosom. She saw  
His lips quiver, and motion'd the Duke to withdraw

And leave them a moment together.

He eyed  
Them both with a wistful regard ; turn'd, and sigh'd,

And lifted the tent door, and pass'd from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident  
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck up  
On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup  
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,  
Monstrous clouds, mass'd, misshapen, and tinged  
with strange dyes,

Hover'd over the red fume, and changed to weird  
shapes

As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks,  
apes,

Chimeras, and hydras : whilst — ever the same —  
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his  
flame,

And changed by his influence !), changeless, as  
when,

Ere he lit down to death generations of men,  
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which  
there

With wild shapes this cloud-world seem'd to mimic  
in air,

The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone,  
And shall shine on the ages we reach not — the  
sun !

## XXXVI.

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,  
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapours  
arise  
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and  
revolve  
Round the great central life, which is Love : these  
dissolve  
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there  
terror,  
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,  
And endless complexity, lasts but a while ;  
Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile  
Of God on the soul, in the deep heart of Heaven  
Lives changeless, unchanged : and our morning  
and even  
Are earth's alternations, not heaven's.

## XXXVII.

While he yet  
Watch'd the skies, with this thought in his heart ;  
while he set  
Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,  
Summ'd it up, search'd it out, proved it vapour  
and wind,  
And embraced the new life which that hour had  
reveal'd, —  
Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and con-  
ceal'd ;  
Lucile left the tent and stood by him.

Her tread  
Aroused him ; and, turning towards her, he said :  
' O Sœur Seraphine, are you happy ? '

' Eugène,  
' What is happier than to have hoped not in  
vain ? '

She answer'd, — ' And you ? '

' Yes.'

' You do not repent ? '

' No.'

' Thank heaven ! ' she murmur'd. He musingly  
bent

His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart  
Where he stood, sigh'd, as tho' to his innermost  
heart,

' O blessed are they, amongst whom I was not,  
' Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,  
' Predicts a pure evening ; who, sun-like, in light  
' Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set  
bright ! '

But she in response, ' Mark yon ship far away,  
' Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,  
' With all its hush'd thunders shut up ! Would  
you know

' A thought which came to me a few days ago,  
' Whilst watching those ships ? . . . When the  
great Ship of Life,

' Surviving, though shatter'd, the tumult and strife  
' Of earth's angry element, — masts broken short,  
' Decks drench'd, bulwarks beaten — drives safe  
into port,

' When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,  
' Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand ;  
' When, heeding no longer the sea's baffled roar,  
' The mariner turns to his rest evermore ;  
' What will then be the answer the helmsman  
must give ?

' Will it be . . . " Lo our log-book ! Thus once  
did we live

' In the zones of the South ; thus we traversed the  
seas

' Of the Orient ; there dwelt in the Hesperides :

' Thence follow'd the west wind ; here, eastward  
we turn'd ;

'The stars fail'd us there; just here land we discern'd

'On our lea; there the storm overtook us at last;

'That day went the bowsprit, the next day the mast;

'There the mermen came round us, and there we saw bask

'A syren?' The Captain of Port will he ask

'Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!

'But . . . "What is the last Bill of Health you can show?"

'Not—How fared the soul through the trials she pass'd?

'But—What is the state of that soul at the last?'

'May it be so!' he sigh'd. 'There! the sun drops, behold!'

And indeed, whilst he spoke all the purple and gold

In the west had turn'd ashen, save one fading strip  
Of light that yet gleam'd from the dark nether lip  
Of a long reef of cloud; and o'er sullen ravines  
And ridges the raw damps were hanging white  
screens

Of melancholy mist.

'*Nunc dimittis!*' she said.

'O God of the living! whilst yet 'mid the dead

'And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days

'Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,

'In both these confirm us!

'The helmsman, Eugène,

'Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always  
Again

'We two part: each to work out Heaven's will:  
you, I trust,

'In the world's ample witness; and I, as I must,

'*In secret* and silence: you, love, fame, await;

'*Me, sorrow* and sickness. We meet at one gate

'*When all's over.* The ways they are many and  
wide,

- ‘ And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side  
‘ May we stand at the same little door when all’s done !  
‘ The ways they are many, the end it is one.  
‘ He that knocketh shall enter : who asks shall obtain :  
‘ And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugène !’

She turn’d to depart.

‘ Whither ? whither ? ’ . . . . he said.

She stretch’d forth her hand where, already out-spread

On the darken’d horizon, remotely they saw  
The French camp-fires kindling.

‘ O Duc de Luvois,

- ‘ See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart  
‘ Made as one man’s by one hope ! That hope ’tis your part  
‘ To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse :  
‘ Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sickness to nurse.  
‘ I go to my work : you to yours.’

XXXVIII.

Whilst she spoke,

On the wide wasting evening there distantly broke  
The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,  
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellow’d a gun.  
‘ Our chasseurs are at it ! ’ he mutter’d.

She turn’d,

Smiled, and pass’d up the twilight.

He faintly discern’d

Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky  
Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists : by  
and by  
The vapours closed round, and he saw her no  
more.

## XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is  
o'er.

The mission of genius on earth ! To uplift,  
Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,  
The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavour  
To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.

The mission of genius : to watch, and to wait,  
To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.

The mission of woman on earth ! to give birth  
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.

The mission of woman : permitted to bruise  
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,  
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd  
curse,

The blessing which mitigates all : born to nurse,  
And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal  
The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

## XL.

A power hid in pathos : a fire veil'd in cloud :  
Yet still burning outward : a branch which, tho'  
bow'd,

By the bird in its passage, springs upward again :  
Thro' all symbols I search for her sweetness — in  
vain !

Judge her love by her life. For our life is but  
love

In act. Pure was hers : and the dear God above,  
Who knows what His creatures have need of for  
life,

And whose love includes all loves, thro' much  
patient strife

Led her soul into peace. Love, tho' love may be  
given

*In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven  
She saw dawn clear and clearer, as life's troubled  
dream*

Wore away ; and love sigh'd into rest, like a  
stream  
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the  
shore  
Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore  
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its  
source  
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,  
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever  
rose  
And set, without influence somewhere. Who  
knows  
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature ?  
No life  
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife  
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.  
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,  
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne  
And gaze into the Face that makes glorious their  
own,  
Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest  
sorrow,  
Honest work for the day, honest hope for the mor-  
row,  
Are these worth nothing more than the hand they  
make weary,  
The heart they have sadden'd, the life they leave  
dreary ?  
Hush ! the sevenfold heavens to the voice of the  
Spirit  
Echo : He that o'ercometh shall all things inherit.

## XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up through the fog ;  
The loud fortress bark'd at her like a chain'd dog.  
The horizon pulsed flame, the air sound. All with-  
out,  
War and winter, and twilight, and terror, and  
doubt ;



All within, light, warmth, calm !  
In the twilight, long with  
Eugène de Luvois with a deep thoughtful smile  
Linger'd, looking, and listening, lone by the te'  
At last he withdrew, and night closed as he w

THE END.



\_\_\_\_\_





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